PCZONE

ISSUE 123 CHRISTMAS 2002 **£4.99**

JAMES BOND 007
NIGHTFIRE

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PROJECT NOMADS
ROLLERCOASTER
TYCOON 2
WWE RAW

FIRST REVIEW

MEDAL OF
HONOR
ALLIED ASSAULT
SPEARHEAD

AGE OF
MYTHOLOGY

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TINY COMPO:
What's the name of
John Cleese's character
in the Bond films?

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YOUR COVERMOUNT IS MISSING
PLEASE CONSULT YOUR NEWSAGENT

Can you see the 300,000 infantrymen, 600 Panzer tanks and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture?
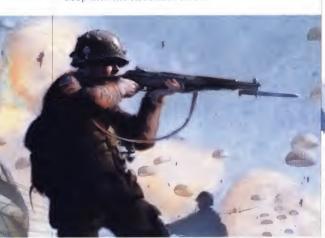
Neither could they.

1944: The Long Road to Berlin

Jun. 6: D-Day
Since dropping behind enemy lines 3,000 ft. above Normandy, your efforts have pushed the Axis forces deep into the Ardennes forest.

Dec. 16: The Battle of the Bulge
During the worst blizzard in war history, Hitler's greatest gamble begins on a 90 mile loosely-held Allied front.

Dec. 24: The Ardennes Forest
Hold the Allied line until a break in the weather allows American and British forces to begin bombing again.

Ja
Str

PC CD-ROM   gamespy   *n*VIDIA.

Requires Medal of Honor Allied Assault™ to play.

SHE'S SMART...
SHE'S SEXY...
AND SHE'S TO DIE FOR

No One Lives Forever 2
A SPY IN H.A.R.M.'S WAY

contents →

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE

Solid Gold

If you're looking for someone to host an awards show you have to be very careful who you call. Even the smallest C-grade celeb will try to shaft you for the equivalent of the GDP of Slovakia, while touting The Brits 1989 as the performance they hope to emulate. When it's also the UK's biggest games awards show, as voted for by the readers of this magazine, you've got to make sure that as well as hiring a professional capable of entertaining a curious mix of programmers, publishers, PR people and journalists, you're going to get someone with more than just a passing interest in games.

Luckily we ended up with Jonathan Ross and the day passed off without any major controversy, although a regular *PC ZONE* contributor did manage to shame himself at the after-show party after pacing himself wholly unsuccessfully from midday onwards. He was probably the only loser on the day though. You voted for the awards, Jonathan Ross picked up a hefty pay cheque for a couple of hours' work, and we ate and drank for free at The Dorchester Hotel. A huge thank you to everyone who voted and made the Golden Joysticks 2002 such a massive success. They'll be back bigger and better next year, but in the meantime you can check out the 2002 results on page 12.

And, because it's Christmas, (well nearly), we've got a few other festive treats. As well as the world's first reviews of *Nightfire* and *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault – Spearhead*, we've teamed up with Microsoft to bring you the *Age Of Mythology* demo before any of our UK rivals, and exclusive audio tracks from the official *Age Of Mythology* soundtrack. And that's got to be better than a pair of socks.

Dave Woods
Editor

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD

COVER DISCS

■ **4 EXCLUSIVE DEMOS**
Age Of Mythology, Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2, Arch Angel and Earth 2150: Lost Souls

■ **11 OTHER PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING**
Unreal Tournament 2003, James Bond 007: Nightfire, Project Nomads, Haegemonia: Legions Of Iron, and the full version of America's Army: Operations

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE**
DVD-Video footage of some of the best games of 2002 and 2003 together with an exclusive Making Of Splinter Cell feature, as well as interviews from this year's EA Play. Plus four demos for America's Army: Operations, Laser Squad Nemesis, Robin Hood: The Legend Of Sherwood and Team Factor 1.6.

Also exclusive to our DVD are DVD Zone Screenshot Packs, Wallpaper Packs, Essential Programs, Essential Drivers for the latest graphics cards and Essential Patches including archived patches from all the biggest PC titles.

■ **NEW PATCHES**
For Airborne Assault, Celtic Kings, Championship Manager Season 01/02, Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza, Divine Divinity, No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way, Operation Flashpoint: Resistance and the Unreal Tournament 2003 Demo.

■ **ALSO**
All the other latest Essential Patches, and all the featured mods in ModWatch.

■ Content differs between the CDs and the DVD. Check the disc pages for more details.

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| Overview | Match Stats | Action Zones | 2D Pitch | Match Report |

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| Home Team Stats | Ratings | Latest Scores | Away Team Stats | Debug |

GOAL FOR CHESTER!!

Options ▾ | Purfleet Tactics | Chester Tactics

Goodbye world, hello...

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE February 2003
WEBSITE www.sigames.com

IN SUMMARY

Championship Manager is the best and most successful football management series of all time. Following three seasonal updates of *CM3*, this is the long-awaited bona fide sequel. We think it might do OK.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The all-new 2D match engine, which actually enables you to watch the game being played out on a rudimentary representation of a football pitch, replete with moving player positions and an animated ball. We're talking revolution, not evolution.
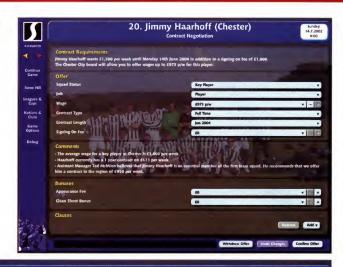
We've finally seen it moving. Yes, moving. And some of you are not going to be happy...

■ **ANGER MANAGEMENT** Steve Hill

TOP STORY

With its bold new look, *Champ Man 4* should finally silence the kind of ill-informed monkeys who liken the series to a jumped-up version of Windows Excel.

WE ALL FEAR change. Nevertheless, it inexorably creeps up on us and engulfs us in its terrifying newness. It's not always a bad thing, mind you. After all, were it not for the invention of the toilet, we'd still be hanging our clinkers out of a first floor window of a morning. The success of *Championship Manager*, however, has always been built on a basic unmoveable foundation: no graphics. For more than a decade, the game has enraptured a generation of virtual managers through the simple medium of words. So what have they done for this fourth version proper? Only gone and added a graphics engine.

OK, so 'graphics' might be stretching the point a little. Suffice to say, you won't need to peruse our hardware section for a new 3D card, but we can confirm the existence of an optional 2D match engine which will run concurrently with the traditional text commentary. Basically, it's a moving version of the tactics board so beloved by Andy Gray on Sky Sports. And while it's a brave new world for *Championship Manager*, the reasonably playable *Ultimate Soccer Manager*

employed a similar method with some degree of success.

While it's not exactly the *FIFA* engine – as recently used by EA in *Total Club Manager* – it still represents a sizeable leap for *Champ Man*, and is a fundamental change that will inevitably irk the purists. However, Marc Vaughan, developer at Sports Interactive says: "It's a natural evolution. It gives people improved feedback on what's happening in the game, why they're letting goals in, why they're scoring goals. It's the obvious way to allow people to analyse things further."

As for the minutiae of tactics, rather than relying on guesswork, SI has gone to the professionals. Erstwhile Liverpool and Republic of Ireland midfielder, Ray Houghton, has for the past 18 months been employed as director of football, studying the match engine and pointing out any obvious tactical anomalies. As Vaughan says: "We've always traditionally spoken to players, managers, agents and

"You'll still be coming across new features six months after you start playing it"

MARK VAUGHAN
DEVELOPER, SPORTS INTERACTIVE

anyone else who will talk to us to find out as much as possible – and make sure the game is as realistic as possible. With Ray we've been very lucky in that we now have an employee of Sports Interactive rather than people just doing us favours."

The match engine aside, there will be more than 40 different leagues, youth teams, completely reworked training, and the ability to delegate several tasks. Furthermore, the interface has been totally redesigned in an attempt to throw off the perennial 'glorified spreadsheet' jibes, and players will be able to customise it and create their own skins. As for other treats, Vaughan is remaining cagey: "There are loads of new features, and a lot of them will be things that you will still be coming across six months after you start playing it. That's always been what I've tried to get into *Champ Man*, and that's basically what keeps it fresh." Bring it on. **PCZ**

Quietly terrifying...

TOP STORY

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q1 2003
WEBSITE www.silenthill2.de

IN SUMMARY

You are James Sunderland, a man whose wife died three years ago. Imagine your surprise then when a letter arrives from your deceased spouse, addressed from your favourite holiday retreat, Silent Hill. You promptly hit the road and arrive at the remote resort intent on finding your long-dead dolly – hopefully not in an advanced state of decomposition. Upon arrival, things turn from mysterious to downright horrific as you battle with gibbering ghouls, an enveloping mist and your own crumbling sanity in a quest for the truth.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Silent Hill 2 is the most horrific and genuinely unsettling survival horror game the world has ever seen. It combines the surreal, psychologically deranged vision of a David Lynch film with the grainy low-key realism of *The Blair Witch Project* and the full-on shocking sadism of *Driller Killer*. This, a port of the Xbox version, comes with the added chapter, Restless Dream, which provides another couple of hours of gameplay over the original PS2 release.
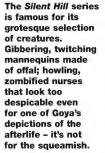
SILENT HILL 2: INNER FEARS
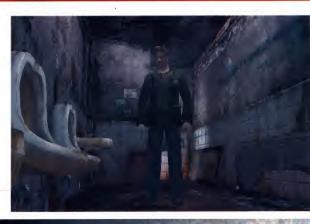
It's the holiday resort from hell. Literally. Prepare to take a permanent vacation

■ **CACKING HIS PANTS** Steve O'Hagan

> **"A thick disorientating mist hangs like a malevolent cloud over the whole town"**

ORDINARILY, RECEIVING A letter from your lovely wife while she's away on holiday would be a great way to start the day. But ordinarily, your wife hasn't been dead for three years.

James Sunderland is the understandably perplexed widower in question, and the remote American backwater of Silent Hill is the vacation destination from which his former bride-cum-presumably putrefying pen-pal is mailing him.

Off sets Jimbo, determined to get to the bottom of this oh-so-unsettling scenario, and thus starts *Silent Hill 2*, in the scummiest motorway lay-by bog you ever saw, overlooking the fog-shrouded town of the same name. What you're facing is a town deserted, bar a shambling army of misshapen monstrosities, arcane puzzles that'll have you scratching your chin raw, and a story so disturbingly twisted it makes *Silence Of The Lambs* seem like *Bambi*.

Of course, none of this will be news to PS2 or Xbox owners, both having already been treated to what those in the know call the most terrifying game of all time. We're not talking the jump in your seat shocks of

an adrenaline fest such as *AVP2*. Oh no, we're talking fear of a far more insidious kind. The sleep-depriving terror you felt as a pre-pubescent watching *The Omen* from under your duvet. The paralysing dread you had upon leaving school only to realise you were going to have to spend the rest of your life working.

What we have here is a port of the Xbox version, identical to the PS2 release but for two additions. First is the rather pointless option to eliminate the graphical 'noise' effect that gives the game its unique, grainy, hand-painted look. Second is an all-new extra chapter – Born From A Wish – which provides an extra couple of hours of gameplay as well as shedding new light upon a couple of the characters from the main game.

While we are not ones to get carried

away over the prospect of a one-year-old console title being ported to PC, *Silent Hill* is such a unique experience that our spines are already shivering in fearful anticipation.

The game plays out in third-person, and contrary to survival horror traditions, none of the locations are pre-rendered, allowing the game camera to roam and take up angles designed to heighten your isolation and claustrophobia with every shot. And believe us, indoors or out, claustrophobia is what you'll feel. A thick, disorientating mist hangs like a malevolent cloud over the whole town,
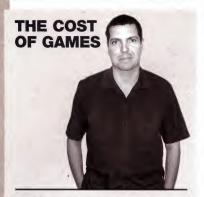
reducing visibility and providing succour to the nameless fiends stalking the streets. But there's no respite to be found indoors either, as the desolate tenements, bars and shops are generally shrouded in complete darkness, with the only illumination provided by the feeble beam of your pocket torch.

Can we say this any louder? *Silent Hill will scare the bejeezus out of you!* An unmissable genre classic that takes horror in videogames to a new, psychological adult high. We're expecting this out sometime early next year, and you'd be a fool – or a total wuss – to miss it. **PCZ**

▲ Hi there. We've another tip top Bulletin section for you this month, with all the hottest news, gossip and exclusive screenshots. We open with a report on the Golden Joystick Awards, recently held at the Dorchester hotel in London, where myself and the whole *PC ZONE* team ditched the *Half-Life* and *Warcraft III* T-shirts to squeeze into our smart suits for one day only.

Of the many Golden Joystick stories that we can print in a family magazine, (certainly not the tale of a certain individual drunkenly "goosing" all the girls at the event) one of the best had to be overhearing host Jonathan Ross proclaiming "Crash Bandicoot? Oh for f**k's sake!" on witnessing a poor actor having to wear a huge costume of the famous console platforming star for the whole of the ceremony. The dapper Mr Ross very kindly gave his only interview of the day to *PC ZONE,* which you can read over the page.

Also this issue we have new screenshots and an exclusive interview with the creators of Vietnam-themed FPS *Vietcong* (page 14), plus a report into the FairPlay campaign (page 16), an online crusade trying to force the videogames industry to make all titles £20 on release. Whether such a low price point is achievable or not, a very valid point is being made about the fact that videogame piracy is continuing to dent profit and investment in the industry. Many gamers are still choosing the illegal route of buying or downloading pirate versions of the top titles for next-to-nothing because they feel that £35-£45 is just too much to pay. But enough of my opinions, what do you think? Make sure you email your eloquent thoughts or bitter rants to letters@pczone.co.uk.

▼

GOLDEN SHOWER

2002's Golden Joystick Award winners announced at a gala ceremony in London

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault was voted PC Game of the Year at the Golden Joystick Awards.

THE RED CARPET was rolled out on October 25 at London's Dorchester hotel for the UK videogames industry's premier award ceremony, The Golden Joysticks, hosted by Dennis Publishing. *PC ZONE* had a front row seat to witness TV celebrity Jonathan Ross award the prestigious Golden Joysticks to the lucky champagne-toasted winners, voted for by more than 30,000 gamers in our magazine, sister publication *Computer And Video Games* and on the two magazine's popular websites.

PC Game of the Year was won by EA Games' stunning *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, which also contributed to EA Games picking up of the Golden Joystick for Publisher of the Year. "We're delighted with both awards," commented a rather happy Keith Ramsdale, UK sales director of Electronic Arts. "*Medal Of Honor* thoroughly deserves the PC award and our congratulations go to our studio for bringing a truly dramatic gaming experience. We're also naturally delighted with the best publisher award as this is a sign that the gaming public recognise the quality in all of our releases. EA UK genuinely thanks them for their continued support."

There was no major surprise with the announcement of *Counter-Strike* as Online Game of the Year, although publisher VU Games were rather taken aback with their award for third-person horror adventure *The Thing* in the Best Use of a Film Licence category. "We're incredibly pleased to win both of these awards," said VU Games' head of PR, Frazer Nash, "but we're especially happy about *The Thing* because we think it's a title that definitely deserves recognition."

By far the biggest winner on the day, however, was Rockstar's violent gun-toting action game *Grand Theft Auto III*, scooping Game of the Year, PlayStation 2 Game of the Year and Game Innovation of the Year, with developer Rockstar North (previously DMA Design) picking up a Golden Joystick for British Developer of the Year. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* also picked up an award for Most Wanted Game For Christmas, a special category voted for by readers of *The Sun.*

Here's a full list of all the categories and winners for the 2002 Golden Joystick Awards.

PC GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (EA Games) **Runners-up:** Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games), Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos (Vivendi Universal Games)

ONLINE GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Counter-Strike (Vivendi Universal Games) **Runners-up:** Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (EA Games), Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos (Vivendi Universal Games)

BEST USE OF A FILM LICENCE
WINNER: The Thing (Vivendi Universal Games) **Runners-up:** Spider-Man (Activision), The Sum Of All Fears (Ubi Soft Entertainment)

XBOX GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Halo (Microsoft Game Studios) **Runners-up:** Dead Or Alive 3 (Tecmo), Max Payne (Take 2 Interactive)

GAMECUBE GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Resident Evil (Capcom) **Runners-up:** Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader (LucasArts), Super Smash Bros. Melee (Nintendo)

HANDHELD GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Golden Sun (Nintendo) **Runners-up:** Mario Kart: Super Circuit (Nintendo), Super Mario World: Super Mario Advance 2 (Nintendo)

PS2 GAME OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games) **Runners-up:** Final Fantasy X (SCEE), Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty (Konami)

Grand Theft Auto III: it's quite popular.

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR
(Voted for by listener's to Radio 1's breakfast show)
WINNER: Pro Evolution Soccer (Konami) **Runners-up:** Championship Manager (Eidos), FIFA 2002 (EA Sports)

GAME INNOVATION OF THE YEAR
WINNER: 'Open-ended play' in Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games) **Runners-up:** 'Bullet time' in Max Payne (Take 2 Interactive), The D-Day landing in Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (EA Games)

HARDWARE OF THE YEAR *(Sponsored by Vivendi Universal)*
WINNER: Microsoft Xbox **Runners-up:** AMD Athlon XP Processor, Nintendo GameCube

BRITISH DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR
WINNER: Rockstar North **Runners-up:** Electronic Arts, Rare

PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR *(Sponsored by Macrovision)*
WINNER: Electronic Arts **Runners-up:** Activision/LucasArts, Microsoft Game Studios

RETAILER OF THE YEAR *(Sponsored by Electronic Arts)*
WINNER: Gameplay.com **Runners-up:** GAME, Amazon.co.uk

MOST WANTED GAME FOR CHRISTMAS
(Voted for by readers of The Sun and The Sun Online)
WINNER: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Rockstar Games) **Runners-up:** Splinter Cell (Ubi Soft), Super Mario Sunshine (Nintendo)

EDITORS' AWARD *(Voted for by the editorial staff at Dennis Publishing)*
WINNER: Pro Evolution Soccer (Konami) **Runners-up:** Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games), Halo (Microsoft Game Studios)

GAME OF THE YEAR *(Sponsored by Jungle.com)*
WINNER: Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games) **Runners-up:** Halo (Microsoft Game Studios), Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (EA Games)

Ross on games

TV's Jonathan Ross talks to *PC ZONE* about his gaming obsession

The presenter of this year's Golden Joystick Awards, Jonathan Ross, is one of Britain's best-known celebrities, but he's also a keen gaming nut. We took time out of our busy schedule drinking free champagne at the Dorchester for this exclusive *PC ZONE* interview with the sharply-dressed man himself…

PCZ You've often been associated with gaming events like the Golden Joysticks, but when did your love of gaming start?

JR My wife and I went out and brought a Sega Master system in about '88 and we were hooked. After that I had an Amiga and then I went on to get a Sega Game Gear and an Atari Lynx. I've still got all of them at home and some of those old titles are still better than modern games, because the gameplay was so solid.

PCZ What are your most fondly remembered games?

JR I loved *Shinobi* and almost all the *Mario* games, *Super Monkey Ball* and *Halo*. I really liked *Black & White* – it was really fresh and interesting. I also liked *Alice* and the *Monkey Island* games. I haven't tried *GTA III* yet, because I don't want my son seeing prostitutes being blown up. I'm saving that for his 12th birthday.

PCZ Why do you think games get so much bad press?

JR I don't think they get as much as they use to, and I think with the games that do get bad press, it's easy to see why. If there was a movie that was as relentlessly violent as *GTAIII* that would get bad press as well. I remember when *The Warriors* came out, it was front page of *The Daily Mail*, who obviously had nothing better to do.

PCZ Your wife (Jane Goodman) used to work as a reviewer on Dennis Publishing's *Zero* magazine, the forerunner to *PC ZONE*, didn't she?

JR Yes, every now and then people stop me in the street and say 'I used to work with your wife and I now work for *Penthouse*' which is sort of worrying. She loved it and I use to love it as well because she would bring home all the test games. We've been playing *Silent Hill* together most recently. She does all the problem solving and when the zombies come, I have to kill them!

PCZ How do you think gaming is going to change in the future?

JR I would like to see more bedroom games development from people just poking around with them at home. I'd like to see that level of excitement and I think it's going to be the next radical shake up, it'll be like when punk shook up the music industry.

Rockstar North won British Developer of the Year.

ZONE editor Woods enjoys a laugh with Ross.

VU Games pick up a Joystick for Counter-Strike.

Indy Rocks!

The world's favourite action hero is back! New screenshots and details on *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb*

AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT of a delayed launch for the next game starring Lara Croft (see page 14), the original tomb raider, Indiana Jones, could be first adventurer to return with PC gaming treasure. LucasArts is preparing to launch *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb* early in the new year, and all the signs point to this latest gaming adventure for the plucky archaeologist being his best yet.

The Emperor's Tomb is set in the Far East during 1935 – before the movie prequel *The Temple of Doom* – and centres around an evil alliance between gangsters and Nazis to steal the Heart of the Dragon, a black pearl with incredible powers. Indy will have to fight his way through ten levels in various locations such as Hong Kong and Prague, using items like his trusty whip as well as his deft hand-to-hand combat skills to dispatch enemies.

Developed by The Collective, *The Emperor's Tomb* promises to deliver a detailed Indiana Jones model with face-scanned Harrison Ford features, smoothly-animated moves for all characters and recorded orchestral music – the first time this has happened in a LucasArts game. More info on Indy's comeback as soon as we get it.

LucasArts • ETA Q1 2003 • www.lucasarts.com/products/indiana/

References to film scenes will be made in *The Emperor's Tomb*.

"The Emperor's Tomb promises to deliver a detailed Indiana Jones model with face-scanned Harrison Ford features"

Jungle swot team

Czech developer reveals the painstaking research behind the awesome-looking *Vietcong*

VIETNAM WAR TACTICAL first-person shooter *Vietcong* is currently shaping up mighty fine, as you can see from these exclusive screenshots. As a team-based game, developer Pterodon is working hard on the AI for the NPCs, who will support players with cover fire and react naturally to the ensuing battles. However, when we recently grabbed a development update on the game's progress from senior designer Jarek Kolar, even we weren't prepared for the extravagant lengths the team has gone to in its research.

"We see *Vietcong* as a 'documentary game'," he says, "and we have collected incredible amounts of source material. For the environments we went to Vietnam to film and photograph everything, listened to the South East Asia biology and geography specialists from the Charles University in Prague and collected tons of de-classified army documents."

To ensure the weapons in *Vietcong* will be as authentic as possible, the Pterodon designers have worked with a Czech shooting magazine, and visited various European museums to gather information on massive weapons such as the Browning Cal.50 and the Russian Gaz. "For military matters we turned to a Czech soldier, Pavel Hubatka, a veteran of Yugoslavia and Bosnia who has also been on US Rangers and Special Forces training programs. We also got in touch with Vietnam war veterans to help with the atmosphere and script," he continues.

So what should this mean for us gamers? "Well, we're hoping it will allow you to experience the fear and action of jungle warfare as if you were there," says Kolar. We'll have more on *Vietcong* very soon…

Pterodon • ETA February 2003 • www.pterodon.cz

Vietcong **promises a war history lesson as well as team-based bullet-pumping.**

Gods and monsters

Destroy classical creatures in Saber Interactive's ancient blaster *Will Rock*

IT'S FAIR TO say that Greek hero Perseus would have enjoyed a slightly easier face-off with the evil snake-haired Medusa had he been armed with a rocket launcher. Well, with the announcement of Ubi Soft's deal to publish Saber Interactive's first-person shooter *Will Rock*, gamers will actually get the chance to decapitate and dismember a menagerie of creatures from Greek and Roman mythology with brutal *Quake*-style weaponry.

Will Rock is named after the unlikely main character Willford Rockwell, a modern-day accountant who, after reading his grandfather's archaeological diary, is propelled back in time when his body is taken over by the spirit of a Titan warrior. Will has to battle through ten huge levels in famous ancient locations such as the Minotaur maze, to vanquish the historical horrors and liberate fantastic treasures that have been lost for millennia.

Saber Interactive boasts that the game will feature unique weapons including an Acid Rifle and Medusa Gun, as well as provide 'real-time shattering' technology so you'll be able to smash up the environments as well as the mythical monsters. Ubi Soft reckons that the quirky adventure *Will Rock* will be released early next year. More news from Zeus and co next month…

Saber Interactive • ETA Q1 2003 • www.saber3d.com

The Minotaur is just one of the classical beasts you'll encounter.

Easy tiger! Two new floor rugs coming up.

The riot shield and two new sub-machine guns, set to feature in the forthcoming *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, are being added to standard *Counter-Strike*.

Building up a head of steam

Valve announces the next stage of its broadband games delivery portal, Steam

VALVE'S BROADBAND BUSINESS platform for content delivery and management is receiving an extensive update, with the launch of Steam Beta 2.0. Online gamers throughout the world should start getting particularly excited, as we're being promised a multitude of new features, which will further enhance many of the already excellent multiplayer games and services that bear Valve's trademark.

With over 125,000 visitors in under a year, Steam has proved popular with a wide variety of gamers, its diverse cross-section of utilities ranging from patches to anti-cheating software. Beta 2.0 is set to offer an integrated set of communications tools that provide built-in support for a variety of services, such as instant messaging, configuration and server browsing for many of Valve's games.

Probably the most notable and exciting additions will be the inclusion of three new weapons for *Counter-Strike* – the riot shield, and FAMAS and Galil sub-machine guns. These are being added to *Counter-Strike* in order to get the community ready for the impending (at least that's

what we're hoping) release of *Condition Zero*, which will feature a wide variety of new weapons, including the three mentioned above.

However, the world's favorite online game won't be the only Valve shooter to get a make-over. *Team Fortress Classic* will be enhanced by an engineer's teleportation pad, a new map called Ravelin (designed by the masters of level design at Valve), and various other gaming tweaks and glitch fixes, which at the time of going to press, had yet to be announced.

Not wanting to omit their hordes on non-hardcore gaming visitors, Valve will also be including several easy to pick up games which can be downloaded and enjoyed, including *Chess*, *Checkers* and *Go*.

With enhanced anti-cheating software and an overall optimised performance rounding off the update, there's much to look forward. In fact we've been informed that by the time you read this, Steam Beta 2.0 will be fully operational, so go check it out now at www.steampowered.com.

Valve Software •
www.steampowered.com

The great videogames rip-off?

A campaign is currently underway that hopes to achieve a sizeable reduction in the price of games, with a nationwide boycott planned. *Steve Hill* investigates

NOBODY LIKES BEING ripped off, and it's even more galling when your hard-earned corn is lining the pockets of greedy capitalist pigs. However, you pays your money, you takes your choice, and nobody is holding a gun to your head when it comes to buying luxury items such as computer games. Nevertheless, the recently-created FairPlay Campaign claims that games are hideously overpriced, and to drive home their point are urging consumers to boycott all purchases in the first week of December, and have dubbed it 'Don't Buy A Videogame Week.'

Spokesman Jonathon Abbott explains, "In the first instance, we're hoping simply to

FairPlay
ACTION FOR CHEAPER VIDEOGAMES
1st - 8th December 2002
DON'T BUY A VIDEOGAME WEEK

bring the issue of game pricing into the public eye, and alert people to the fact that not only consumers but also a significant part of the industry firmly believes that they can and should be much lower. Ultimately, of course, what we want to achieve is to get prices down."

The people behind the campaign believe there is no reason for games to cost more than £20, and their website claims to prove this via a (frankly unfathomable) mathematical equation. However, some industry insiders claim that their figures simply don't add up. Miles Jacobson of *Championship Manager* developer Sports Interactive is one of the Campaign's most outspoken critics and says: "They claim there is no justified reason for games to be more than £20. I'm sorry but they're wrong on that score because there are huge costs involved. We're not mass market in the

Check out Bargain Hunter (p32) for tips on how to get cheaper games.
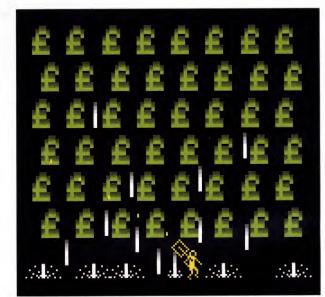
same way as music is, and we don't have as many ways to sell as music does." (Ironically, minutes earlier Jacobson was bragging about a version of *Championship Manager* that sold 103,000 copies in a weekend.)

Campaigner Abbott believes the comparison with music is a bogus argument: "It's complete drivel. For one thing, it's a chicken-and-egg scenario – how many copies do you think the average music CD would sell if it cost £40? And secondly, the truth of the matter is that top-selling games actually do sell just as many copies as top-selling albums. *Super Mario Brothers*, for example, sold 40 million copies, which is more or less the same as Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the biggest-selling album ever. And that was at a time when the games market was smaller than it is now. The 'smaller market' argument just doesn't hold water. Games can sell just as many copies as albums or movies or whatever, so the problem obviously isn't the size of the audience. It's just that fewer games achieve those sort of sales. Why? Because they cost £40."

Many of the FairPlay arguments refer to the price of console games, as PC titles tend to be slightly cheaper, around the £30 mark. Piracy is clearly a key issue and there is no guarantee that a reduction in price would make a significant impact. After all, nought pounds from a warez site is still more tempting than 20 pounds from a shop. But Abbott thinks a price cut across the board could make a difference: "As with all arguments about piracy, it's complete supposition either way. We don't think cheaper games would eradicate piracy, but we do think that a sizeable number of people who currently pirate for 'moral' reasons – ie they think they're being ripped off, rather than that they can't afford it – would buy legitimate games instead if they were a fair price."

Other industry figures such as Lionhead Studios' Peter Molyneux agrees with some of the sentiments expressed in the FairPlay campaign. "I do think fundamentally that £40-£45 is not a mass-market price, any retailer you speak to will tell you that... I'm pretty confident that when we're selling millions and millions of these games, it's not going to be at £45, but I'm not sure how we're going to get there and what's going to have to give on the way."

Industry body ELSPA has declined to issue a formal statement on the campaign, but Director General, Roger Bennett, told *PC ZONE*: "I think the statement [on the website] that computer and videogames

Do you pay too much for your PC games?

READERS' LIVES

OPINIONS FROM THE MESSAGE BOARD

"It's simple logic that needs to be employed here. Low prices = more customers = new customers = more money and a more stable future for publishers, developers and most important of all, us gamers."
SLOTH82

"I've read the FairPlay statement fully and it's like the pathetic dribblings of a village idiot. Simple economics: Good companies survive by the quality/attractiveness of their products. Poor ones die and go bust. This FairPlay gimmick can suck my monkey cock."
captain_moquette

"Games prices are like access to national parks or theme parks. If the owners of the theme park put prices down, even by a couple of pounds, a hell of a lot more people would buy tickets because they are cheaper, thus the company would make more money. Same applies to PC games, put the price down on them and more will be bought. Simple marketing."
Gangster15

"I don't think games should be cheaper because it costs a bleeding fortune to make games, and if the price of it was lowered then they would never make a profit."
GRAHAM_123

"If all developers dumped the hangers on and sold the games direct to the public it would be better for all concerned."
PtRyanS

"At the end of the day these companies are in business to make money, and this means charging as much as they can get away with. They are not in it to be fair or cheap."
HeMan_SgtDave

"As long as there are people out there who will buy the newest games en masse at whatever price is set, there is no reason for them to lower it."
JakobG

"'Implicit collusion' is an economic term for when a group of companies have an unspoken agreement to keep prices inflated so that they all benefit from increased profits. Sound familiar?"
ChosenJuan

"Piracy is clearly a key issue and there is no guarantee that a reduction in price would make a significant impact"

FairPlay
ACTION FOR CHEAPER VIDEOGAMES

The FairPlay Campaign has split games industry opinion.

only cost 40p to produce is extremely misleading and disingenuous. There are so many holes in the argument that they are making, a lot of the quotes are out of date, the facts aren't right, and a lot of elements in the context of the cost of production are omitted."

It is perhaps surprising then that many of the key exponents of the campaign actually work within the industry. Freelance games journalist Stuart Campbell is heavily involved, and makes his opinions clear on the FairPlay website: "Some of us have tried for many years to use quiet persuasion and reason on the subject of game pricing, but it's all fallen on deaf ears. FairPlay was the only option left, but it will only turn into a public relations disaster if the industry maintains its current policy of sticking its fingers in its ears and screeching 'La la la la we can't hear you!' every time any consumer or industry figure raises any genuine or reasonable concerns about paying too much for the latest game releases."

publishers charging what they know they can get away with. To us as games journalists, their value is largely abstract, although I can safely say that I wouldn't spend 40 quid on a music CD. But, as Roger Bennett says: "The value you get from a game can't be compared with a video, a DVD or an album. It's a different animal altogether. A game is not a comparable article with any other entertainment. How can you make comparisons when you're not actually comparing apples with apples?"

Abbott remains convinced that prices are kept artificially high: "The people behind FairPlay aren't just consumers. We also have more than 50 years of experience in the games industry, in all areas from journalism to development. We know full well that the price of games is down to nothing more than a policy decision by publishers and hardware manufacturers. It's pretty obvious when you look at the figures that there's no inherent reason games have to be £40. The installed bases are easily big enough that cheaper games could sell

"A game is not a comparable article with any other entertainment"

Abbott believes that the boycott will have a significant impact: "In the opening few weeks of the campaign, the site's been averaging more than 60,000 unique visitors a week, and that's with fairly minimal publicity. We're expecting a lot more as it gets nearer the time, we've already had tabloid and TV interest."

However, Jacobson at SI says: "The campaign has run into a lot of brick walls. The newspapers realised that the stuff they were being told by the FairPlay Campaign wasn't necessarily true. And when tabloids aren't running stories because they're untrue, you know they're really not true."

So who's wrong and who's right? Are games too expensive, or is it a case of

enough copies to make more money overall than they do now."

A further twist has been added to the argument by the revelation that the videogame industry is currently at an all time high, with 2002 sales of £1.147 billion, according to ELSPA's latest figures. So either a lot of people are happy, or a lot of people are getting poor value for money. What do you think? Send your rants and arguments to *PC ZONE* via email or snail mail, but just don't ask me for my opinion – the last game I bought was on tape…

www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk
www.ilikecake.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/campaign/

PlayStation Nation

Capcom storms in with a triple bill of PSone ports

JAPANESE CONSOLE and arcade games giant Capcom has announced the release of three of its games for the PC, at the budget price of £12.99 each. The trio consists of *Breath Of Fire IV*, *Mega Man X6* and *Dino Crisis 2*, all of them ports from PSone, and all due out in February.

Which one you'll want most depends on your interests, as each one represents a vastly different genre. *Mega Man X6* is a old-school, anime-influenced, side-scrolling platform-shooter, *Dino Crisis 2* is a survival horror that plays like *Resident Evil* meets *Jurassic Park*, and *Breath Of Fire IV* is a Japanese style RPG with the added bonus of the main characters being able to transform into dragons.

The price is good, though these are far from A-list titles, so they'll probably appeal mostly to rabid fans of each of the genres who are feeling the pinch.

Capcom • ETA Feb 2003 •
www.capcom.com

Check out those 32bit graphics.

Francophobia

Iru: Tales From The Edge Of The World leads the latest pack of titles from French publisher Microids

FRENCH PUBLISHER MICROIDS has a trio of games lined up for release over the next few months, most promising among them, arcade adventure *Iru: Tales From The Edge Of The World*.

Looking more like a console game than a PC title, *Iru* is set in a frozen wasteland where an evil witch (called Sukko) holds sway. You play spikey-haired shaman Iru, and using your trusty harpoon as well as spells learnt along the way, you tackle a multitude of creatures in arcade style fights and wrestle with puzzles in a true action adventure stylee.

Next on the Gallic games list is *War And Peace*, a historical RTS that prides itself on a blend of politics, economics, diplomacy and honest-to-goodness combat. Set at the turn of the 19th century, it allows you to lead one of six European nations to glory under the glare of a rather nice-looking 3D engine.

Last up is stylish adventure *Post Mortem*. With its noir styling, pre-rendered backdrops, dialogue-heavy plot and private investigator hero, we can hardly say it's original, though the developer promises non-linear gameplay, and a whodunnit of mind-boggling intricacy. But as with the other two titles, don't get too excited yet as they all come with a *PC ZONE* warning: "these games are French…"

Microids • ETA: November (*War And Peace*), early 2003 (*Post Mortem*, *Iru*) •
www.microids.com

Marvel at the wonky furniture.

***Iru* is packed with magical creatures.**

COMPETITION

Step into the arena with Unreal Tournament 2003

PC CD-ROM

ATARI — 20 copies of *Unreal Tournament 2003* to be won…

IT'S THE KIND of game you buy a PC for. It's the kind of game you take a week off work for. And it's the kind of game we like to blag copies of to give away to you lot. Yes, courtesy of those wonderful people at Atari and Infogrames, we've got 20 copies of the finest-looking shooter around, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, to off-load onto you lucky readers.

If you're new to the world of FPSs and the invaluable contribution the *Unreal* series has made to it – or if you have the memory of a soya bean – then here's a recap on what you might be about to get your hands on. *Unreal Tournament 2003* is a multiplayer-based shooter featuring just about the best-looking environments your graphics card can currently render. Its razor-sharp frag-fests induce adrenaline quicker than a back-street mugging. Whirring rotary cannons, rocket launchers, plasma rifles and laser cutters, each with two fire functions provide the pyrotechnics, and with such exquisite weapon balance, you know you've always got a chance against the guy trying to fry your ass, no matter what tool you've got to hand.

Incredibly detailed maps, a huge array of skins, customisable bots, weapon sets and physics mutators, including low gravity big head mode, mean there's little time to be thinking about getting bored. So if you want some of this action – no, if you think you can handle some

of this action – then scribble down the answer to the following *UT 2003* question on the back of a postcard and whiz it off the us.

WHICH OF THESE IS NOT A WEAPON IN UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
A. Bio Rifle
B. Flak Cannon
C. Bull's Pizzle

Send your answer on a postcard, along with with all the information requested, to the address below:
■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (and age if under 18).
■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.
■ Please indicate whether or not you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.
Send your entry to: Unreal Competition, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland St, London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: December 12 2002).

Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

Moody Blue!

Add a splash of colour to your desktop with the dazzling design, custom blue accents and dynamic features of the NEW Microsoft® MultiMedia Keyboard. Now you can maximise your digital experience and enjoy a faster way to perform common tasks with one-touch buttons that take you directly to many of your favourite multimedia activities – listen to music, watch video clips, surf the web and start many of your most often used programs, files or commands*. In fact whatever your mood – it's the keyboard that's designed to fit your digital lifestyle.

www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware/desktop

Microsoft

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

This month: Dave Perry, president of Shiny Entertainment

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
The one I couldn't resist taking a quick five minutes on was *Battlefield 1942* from EA.

What was the last game you finished?
Chu Chu Rocket! on Game Boy Advance. I was sick of hearing about the thing, so I felt I should check it out.

What is your favourite game of all time?
I used to say *Command & Conquer*, but that's pretty old now. I am also personally a big supporter of MAME and their efforts to keep the history of gaming alive. I liked *Max Payne* a lot, same for *Deus Ex*. I'm always excited about some new gameplay hook coming up, so *GTA III* was the last one of choice.

What are you most proud of in your career?
Shiny just hit nine years old! I am most proud of the fact that after 20 years, I am still enjoying this so much.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
I would have said Peter Molyneux as he thinks big and takes risks. In Japan, I like Kojima's work, as he does the same. I am not quite the Miyamoto fanboy that most people in the industry are, but I certainly respect him. I think the Stamper Brothers at Rare also deserve respect.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
The PC is always stepping into the future. I laugh when console people slam it, as two years later, when those same console people are playing their old dusty machine, the PC market has been endlessly zooming forward.

What is your company's philosophy?
The only way to survive is to push forward on *all* aspects of your games – better design, better technology, better writing, better graphics and animation. We never, ever just sit back and relax.

What's the best thing about your job?
That I am able to work on titles I care about.

What's the worst thing about your job?
I miss daylight. Beaches. Beer.

What are you currently working on?
Enter The Matrix, which should be released with the next *Matrix* movie. Life is good. We get paid to hang out with Trinity.

The Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Speech recognition, cognition and generation. When I can order people around that think for themselves and respond, then I'll be a happy camper. That will make games a whole *lot* more immersive.

The phantom menace

The F-4 Phantom is the star of the show in *Strike Fighters: Project 1*, a combat flight sim set in the winging '60s

DOING SOMETHING different with a flight sim is tricky these days, with every conflict from WWI to the Gulf War covered. Which is why US developer Third Wire has chosen to set its debut combat flyer *Strike Fighters* in the 1960s.

You get to fly four of the major US planes of the period, beginning with F-100 Super Sabres, and ending up with the mighty F-4 Phantom. The USSR makes a welcome return as your enemy (the game is set during the Cold War after all) but you don't get any Russkie planes to fly.

Although this is Third Wire's first title, the team, headed up by renowned flight sim designer Tsuyoshi Kawahito, is responsible for acclaimed WWII flight sim *European Air War*. Alongside single mission modes, you get to play through a dynamic campaign as either a USAF pilot or a mercenary. In this mode, you'll fly missions through the course of a decade. As well as new planes, weapons are introduced as you go, including primitive sidewinder missiles and, for when you absolutely positively need to waste every organism in the vicinity, a dose of Uncle Sam's finest napalm.

Strike Fighters weighs in at the more immediate end of the flight sim market, with little knowledge of avionics required to line up a Commie bomber in your sights and to send him to pinko hell with a burst of cannon fire. But all the systems are accurate and the flight models feel solid, which should satisfy tech heads. We'll be bringing you a full review next issue.

Strategy First • www.thirdwire.com • ETA Late November

GUNSLINGER 11
Speed 426 kts
Altitude 19818 ft
Heading: 9 deg
Throttle 79 %

Some of the textures are bland, but the feel of flying is ace.

Pirate games

Grab your parrot, eyepatch and peg leg for the piratey trading sim *Port Royale*

AHAAARRRRR ME HEARTIES!
Long John Silver enthusiasts could be walking the plank with pleasure with the announcement of Ascaron Entertainment's *Port Royale*. The company has already enjoyed considerable success with the 17th-century trading game in its native country of Germany, and is sure that it will prove as popular in the UK.

"Any gamers who enjoy the more complex sims around will enjoy *Port Royale*," says managing director of Ascaron, Roger Swindells, "especially those who have enjoyed *Age Of* *Empires*, *Industry Tycoon* or the more historical simulations available. It has the atmosphere and the setting of the good old *Pirates!* game, offering the endless gameplay of a classic trading sim plus the thrill of gorgeous animated sea battles."

Players start the game as one of four nationalities – English, French, Dutch or Spanish – in a small ship exploring 60 different port towns, trading various goods and building up a considerable stash of gold dubloons. As you progress, you get the opportunity to decide your own seafaring career, whether it's as an explorer looking for buried treasure, an adventurer completing more than 100 dangerous missions, a merchant or a ruthless pirate.

The centre-piece of *Port Royale* are the sea battles, which promise beautiful 3D graphics, a choice of three ammo types to launch at foes, and the ability to upgrade ships and employ a large crew of jolly sailors. We'll find out whether *Port Royale* is buried treasure or parrot droppings next February.

Ascaron Entertainment • ETA February 2003 • www.ascaron.com

This is where ZONE's publishers go for regular holidays.

The only thing missing is Guybrush Threepwood.

EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator *Stuart Campbell*

Hot chopper action in *Cobra Command*.

The original *Dragon's Lair*, in all its semi-interactive glory.

HOWLING AT THE MOON

WE'VE COVERED a few grand follies here at Emulation Zone in the past (converting text adventures to the Game Boy, emulating keyrings, *Space Invaders* in a 16x16 pixel box), but it's hard to imagine there'll ever be one quite as

A subtle hint in *Super Don Quixote*.

heroically insane as Daphne. An emulator of the laserdisc coin-ops of the early 1980s, Daphne plays host to a set of games that were near-universally reviled, and quite rightly so. What's more, to play them you have to get hold of MPEG rips of the original laserdiscs, which weigh in at anything up to 2Gb (yes, gigabytes) a time. And to add insult to injury, practically the only two genuinely good laserdisc games – Clint Eastwood movie simulator *Firefox*, and twin-viewpoint scrolling blaster *MACH 3* – are also almost the only two that aren't emulated by Daphne.

So why on Earth are we wasting your time telling you about it? Well, because Emulation Zone has a guilty secret. Emulation Zone actually liked

laserdisc games. *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, in particular, sucked 10p pieces out of Emulation Zone's pocket at a frightening rate two decades ago, and your shame-faced reporter still enjoys nothing more than a quick blast through the excellent Game Boy Color version of *DL* whenever he's stuck on a train for an hour. Sure, they were highly linear games of very limited interaction, but you could say the same thing about *Final Fantasy* (or *Max Payne*, come to that), and *Dragon's Lair* is a heck of a lot better scripted, and a lot better looking too.

While for most people *DL* et al were the extent of laserdisc gaming, a surprisingly wide variety of genres was actually represented. *Firefox* and *MACH 3* resembled *Star Wars* and

Xevious respectively, *Cliff Hanger* was a derring-do-filled spy adventure and *Bega's Battle* was a strange (and, quite frankly, deeply terrible) *Galaga* clone. Then there was *Cobra Command*, which boasted pseudo cel-shaded graphics decades before *Jet Set Radio* even thought of it. You can play 'em (nearly) all in Daphne – if you have a fat enough net connection to download the videos, of course – and Emulation Zone is prepared to bet right here and now that you'll enjoy them a lot more than you'll ever admit to anyone. Go on. Nobody's watching. It'll be our little secret.

LINKS

www.daphne-emu.com – DAPHNE homepage and game ROMs (not MPEGs)

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

▲ **MIAMI CHASE (Codemasters, Amiga, 1991)**

So, you think *Grand Theft Auto*, but set in 1980s Miami (as in the forthcoming *Grand Theft Auto III* sequel, *Vice City*), is a pretty nifty and original idea, do you? Tch! Just goes to show what YOU know. Some of us were already playing that particular game more than a decade ago.

In *Miami Chase* – a £7.99 original budget-game release for the Amiga – you zoom around said viewed-from-above American metropolis in a zappy sports car, disobeying traffic regulations, causing havoc and killing innocent passers-by. You even attract the attention of the rozzers if you go over the top, and they'll chase you down and haul you out ready for a good old Rodney King.

The difference is, in this game you're also a cop (by the classy name of Don Ferrari), so when they catch you, even

if you've just blown up three cars full of innocent people, a big Miami patrolman grins at you with his gold tooth and says "Ah, it's you, Lt Ferrari. Sorry, we had no idea. Carry on." When it comes to corruption, *Grand Theft Auto* was a naïve beginner.

Even the coding of *Miami Chase* was a little shady. It was credited to 'Team 7', an outfit made up of coders more usually associated with *Worms* creators Team 17, and whose logo was identical to Team 17's, but with the '1' blacked out. Clearly some kind of numbers racket, then.

EMULATE IT WITH: WinUAE Amiga emulator

LINKS

www.winuae.net – WinUAE homepage

Grand Theft Auto for beginners.

THE ARTIST

SEPTEMBER 2002

HITMAN 2 - SILENT ASSASSIN

Enter the mind of a genetically-engineered assassin-for-hire, whose deadly efficiency is now needed more than ever. Lured back into a global ring of deception by a twisted Russian crime boss, he must kill not only to make a living, but to continue living. This time it's not just business…**it's personal.**

www.hitman2.com
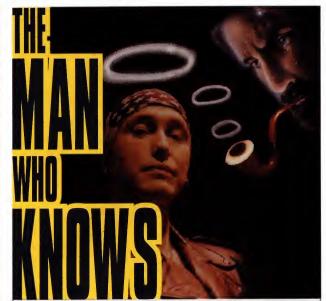
Io-Interactive

HITMAN 2
SILENT ASSASSIN™

EIDOS
INTERACTIVE

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

GAMES KILL. OR at least they do if you play them non-stop for three and a half days. Clearly defying the advice proffered in the manual, a 24-year-old man dropped dead in **Kwangju, South Korea** following a marathon 86-hour session of PC gaming in an Internet cafe. **Mr Kim**, unemployed, was found slumped in front of his monitor, briefly regained consciousness, but was then found dead in the toilets shortly afterwards. Initial investigations ruled out murder, and according to police detective **Oh Myong-sik**, witnesses reported that the deceased gamer had neither slept nor eaten during his epic game-athon. He is believed to have died of exhaustion.

Astonishingly, just ten days later, a 27-year-old man also died of exhaustion following a trifling 32-hour session in a cyber-cafe in central **Taiwan**. Starting at 10:30 on a Thursday evening, **Lien Wen-cheng** played games continuously, only pausing for toilet breaks, and at 7am on the Saturday, a staff member found him on the bog floor, foaming at the mouth and bleeding from the nose. Local police reported: 'They rushed him to hospital but he was already dead.'

On a lighter note, the inaugural **Christian Game Developers Conference** has passed without incident. Following the event in **Portland, Oregon, USA**, organiser **Tim Emmerich** of **GraceWorks Interactive** preached: "I consider the first Christian Game Developers Conference to be a total success. It was profound to see so many interested developers gathered together." UK-based colleague **Richard Patching** is working on a 3D version of an abysmal text adventure called *Jarod's Journey*, and he revealed: "If you look at the Christian industry, music, films etc, they are never really cutting edge, they always seem to be behind the times, and it's something that I want to change. I want to break the typical religious stereotype, and show people that Christianity isn't about going to church on a Sunday and singing hymns!" As for some of the more visceral games on the market, Patching admitted: "I used to love *Quake*, I didn't like *Soldier Of Fortune* much though. From a Christian perspective, I think these games are OK, but you have to be careful about what you play. Us Christian youth have a saying: WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? So if you think Jesus would play these games then go ahead... but I couldn't imagine him playing *GTAIII*, could you? Also games can get very addictive, and if this becomes a distraction then that's also wrong. God has to be your number one priority!"

And finally, **The Unstoppable Games Animal** is refusing to stop. **Dave Perry**, (*not Mr Shiny Entertainment interviewed on page 20! – Ed*), who in the 1990s almost single-handedly cemented the public's perception of gamers as slack-jawed cretins, is making a comeback. Last seen hawking electrical equipment on shopping channel **QVC**, the handkerchief-wearing erstwhile *GamesMaster* presenter has set up some website. Perry boasted: "I had over 70 different bandanas." Considerably less friends, though.

> ## "A 27-year-old man died of exhaustion following a 32-hour session in a cyber-cafe"

Blood-sucker

The latest on Nazi-killing vampire adventure *BloodRayne*

BLOODRAYNE IS THE forthcoming third-person bite-'em-up from Terminal Reality, featuring a sexy, female vampire chomping and blasting her way through half of Hitler's war machine.

"Everybody has fought Nazis in games, and everyone has seen vampires in games. We found a clever way of merging the two together that gives BloodRayne a unique, fresh perspective," says the game's producer, Jeff Mills.

Rayne, the rent-a-goth heroine of Terminal Reality's action title, not only has access to cool guns and blades, but also has a range of acrobatic moves to see off the Nazi hordes. "She can shoot a gun in each hand at two separate targets as she somersaults to the side, as well as throwing out a harpoon to yank distant victims to her so she can feed on them."

Players can also use Rayne's powers to see enemies in the dark, slow down the action à la *Max Payne* and launch a vicious Blood Rage combo. "We've made the enemies more human by teaching them to fear the hero," continues Mills. "If you dismember a bunch of soldiers with one sweeping Blood Rage attack, there's a pretty good chance that any nearby survivors will freak out and run for their lives." Which makes a lot of sense, if you think about it.

So, is Rayne the new Lara Croft? "Don't forget that Rayne is half monster. There's an innate evil in her that makes her an anti-hero in many ways. She feeds on living human victims to survive! Rayne has much more sex appeal than any mere human woman..." *BloodRayne* will be published by VU Games next March.

Terminal Reality • ETA March • www.bloodrayne.com

Rayne enjoys a quick snack.

Jocks away

Data Becker's Scottish strategy sim *Highland Warriors* given UK release date

SASSANACHS BETTER beware, because the Scottish kilt-wearing Bravehearts are about to invade a PC near you. Publisher Novalogic has signed on the dotted line for Data Becker's bloody feudal strategy sim *Highland Warriors*, which has been scheduled for release on February 14.

The game begins with the original founding of bonnie Scotland around 850AD and peaks with the fight for independence by the Bravehearts during the 13th and 14th centuries. Over four campaigns and 30 missions, players will get to fight the battle at Stirling Bridge side by side with William Wallace, and share in the glorious victory at Bannockburn with Robert the Bruce. Or you can, of course, take command of the English 'baddies'.

PC ZONE spoke to product manager Tina Feilen, and asked why a German company is so interested in Scottish history. "The fantastic possibilities of our ATLAS engine gave us the chance to make a very realistic game, with great graphics, real-time shadows and a freely rotating camera with incredible zoom. The logical step was to choose a real, historical setting rather than, say, a futuristic theme."

Highland Warriors does not however, aim to be an historically accurate representation of the period, with different fictional clans and their heroes able to draw on mystical powers to help in their battle against the English. "Druids, for example, can conjure plagues or magic dragons which will destroy any enemy unit or building," continues Feilen. "As in Hollywood movies, the main focus of games is on entertainment and fun and not on historical correctness." We'll keep you posted on *Highland Warriors* until next year's Scottish Valentine's Day Massacre.

Data Becker • ETA February 14 • www.highlandwarriors.com

"Er, fellas, I can't see a thing in this..."

It's cold in the Highlands, so light a fire.

Hot-headed

New games company MercurySteam reveals its first project

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF *Darkness* was a very successful hack-and-slash action-adventure, gaining a whopping 87 per cent in *PC ZONE* on its release in 2001. A year on and developer Rebel Act Studios – part of the founding team of *Severance* – have left to form a new games company based in Madrid, known as MercurySteam.

"Our main objective with MercurySteam is to excite the imagination," says lead designer and Enric Alvarez. "We want to make high quality games to entertain and surprise people. Our first project is a 3D arcade adventure that integrates fantasy and reality."

From the look of these impressive pieces of concept artwork, MercurySteam's new unnamed title appears to be a highly promising space blaster, which Alvarez is convinced will deliver an altogether more involving experience than *Severance*.

"The player can move around in detailed indoor settings as well as huge outdoor environments, on foot or choosing from a range of vehicles that you can build any way you like. We're also planning to provide a fresh, deep and 100 per cent competitive multiplayer experience." MercurySteam's first title is due for release in 2004 – we'll be bringing you more details very soon.

MercurySteam • ETA 2004 • www.mercurysteam.com

MercurySteam's first game should be a visual treat.

Space ace

Hands-on with CCP Games' *EVE Online: The Second Genesis*

An online Elite for the 21st century.

You'll have more than 60 ships to pilot.

CRUCIAL Entertainment has teamed up with Icelandic developer CCP Games to create *EVE Online: The Second Genesis*, a massively multiplayer space exploration sim with a player-driven economy.

With support for 100,000 players, expect a booming market. Five available races (including a hidden one) welcome new recruits, who'll scour a gorgeously rendered cosmos seeking wealth and power. Though 15 initial character classes are offered, dozens of available skill sets quickly let you blur the lines between professional and pirate.

Furthermore, every item in the game must be created. To do so, you'll have to gain blueprints by accomplishing missions, looting vessels, and purchasing them outright. Collect the raw materials required for these commodities and any space station will happily produce one of over 1,100 available goods.

Despite some unique features – training occurs even while offline, so you can gain skills just as fast as obsessive players – the game features strong competition from Electronic Arts' *Earth & Beyond*, still currently without a UK release date. Nonetheless, count on a big bang when it reaches for the stars in March 2003.

CCP Games • ETA March 2003 • www.ccpgames.com

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack TOP 10

ELSPA

		TITLE	WEEKS IN CHART	SCORE
1	NEW	**THE SIMS: UNLEASHED**	1	78%
2	NEW	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	1	80%
3	NEW	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003	1	90%
4	NEW	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	1	N/A
5	NEW	HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN	1	74%
6	▼	TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2003	5	77%
7	▼	BATTLEFIELD 1942	5	78%
8	NEW	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2	1	93%
9	▼	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	29	66%
10	▼	MAFIA	8	92%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

The Sims is down to only three chart places, so that's good news I guess. Some titles are only selling on the strength of their predecessors, and *TCM2003* is selling because *CM4* isn't out yet. Nice to see *NOLF2* and *Mafia* in there.
TomChip123

NOLF2 has been robbed of its rightful place at the top. *Unreal Tournament 2003* has got to number three because of the pre-release hype, and as for the bloody *Sims* – burn them! Burn 'em all!
Ne_Plus_Ultra

Mafia deserves to be number one more than anything. It's definitely the game of the year. As for *UT2003* though, it seems to have lost its growl after only a few days play. I reckon that if it wasn't for the mods, then *UT* would be dead.
GRAHAM_123

NOLF2 charting at only number eight shows that people still have painful memories of the first game. Who said us gamers had short memories eh?
SLOTH82

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED
2	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
3	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2
4	MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
5	MAFIA
6	BATTLEFIELD 1942
7	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
8	HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN
9	STRONGHOLD CRUSADER
10	LINKS 2003

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: Who's the famous designer behind the *Rollercoaster Tycoon* franchise?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ13A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: December 12 2002

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

MISSING IN ACTION
The war's not over until the last game comes home...

Splinter Cell

"DEFINITELY."
"You're sure?"
"Absolutely 100 per cent. *Splinter Cell* will be released on the PC before Christmas." And with that short exchange with Ubi Soft in the bank, we should have guessed that *Splinter Cell* would in fact slip to its new release date, January 31. It's still going to be fantastic, it just isn't here, and although there's no official word on why, we'd guess that the developers are concentrating on getting the Xbox version out of the door first. Oh well, the fantastic news is that your fave PC mag will have the exclusive review and playable demo before anyone else.

Ubi Soft Montreal • ETA January 31 2003 • www.splintercell.com

The Y-Project

THE GOOD-LOOKING but funny-named German FPS *The Y-Project* has met with a terrible fate. Following months of desperate restructuring and money-raising, developer Westka Interactive (previously responsible for the abysmal *Arcatera*) has gone tits up, ceasing operations and laying off all of its 44 staff. Needless to say, the game has been unceremoniously canned.

The Y-Project wowed several attendees at ECTS with its impressive graphical panache. However, its very good looks may have been its downfall, as the cost of investing in expensive *Unreal* technology undoubtedly contributed to Westka's eventual ruin.

Westka Interactive • Killed In Action • www.y-pro.net

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down

NOVALOGIC'S TEAM-BASED shooter based on the 1993 US army operation in Somalia has been put back until early next year. "We feel that we need to invest some additional time in 'polishing' the title," said company president Lee Milligan. It'll hopefully be worth the wait, because from what we've seen of it so far, *Black Hawk Down* could be the best *Delta Force* title yet. We'll have the exclusive single-player demo free in the next issue of *ZONE*.

NovaLogic • ETA Q1 2003 • www.novalogic.com

US TOP 10

1	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED
2	BATTLEFIELD 1942
3	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
4	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
5	THE SIMS: VACATION
6	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION
7	THE SIMS
8	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2
9	MAFIA
10	ZOO TYCOON

SOURCE NPD Techworld

INCOMING!

These are the big games that are going on sale in the next month or so. All dates are correct at the time of going to press, but we'd check ahead before running down to the shops in the driving rain.

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	EA	November 22
Aquanox 2: Revelation	JoWooD	November 22
James Bond 007: Nightfire	EA	November 27
Star Trek: Starfleet Command 3	Activision	November 29
MoH: AA – Spearhead	EA	December 6
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	Microsoft	December 6
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	January 31
Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	January 31
TOCA Race Driver	Codemasters	February
IGI 2 – Covert Strike	Codemasters	February

100 | 98
ARMOR | HEALTH

CHASER

As it races towards completion, we bring you exclusive shots from one of the most promising first-person shooters of next year
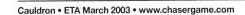
WE'VE BEEN following the progress of this Slovak-based game now for well over a year, watching with interest as it's matured into one of the most promising FPSs of the near future.

Utilising the CloakNT engine, *Chaser* is looking little short of stunning, with its rich graphics complemented by some unsettlingly realistic animation. Rarely have we seen more lifelike character animations than here. And when you think that *Chaser* only utilises 60 per cent of CloakNT's full potential, you can see why this is an engine not only for today, but for the future.

The plus side is that *Chaser*'s frantic gameplay (in which you play a character with memory loss who is wanted by sinister forces) and challenging lifelike AI (which rolls, dodges, takes cover and runs away) will be accessible to just about anyone with a PIII 450 or higher. And the plot is set to be just as gripping as the gameplay, as you struggle for survival in a near-future sci-fi setting – while trying to unravel the mysteries of your forgotten past.

We'll be bringing you a full playtest of this dark horse FPS in the very near future. For the time being, though, feast your eyes on these visual delights and start dreaming about just how good the end product is going to be. **PCZ**
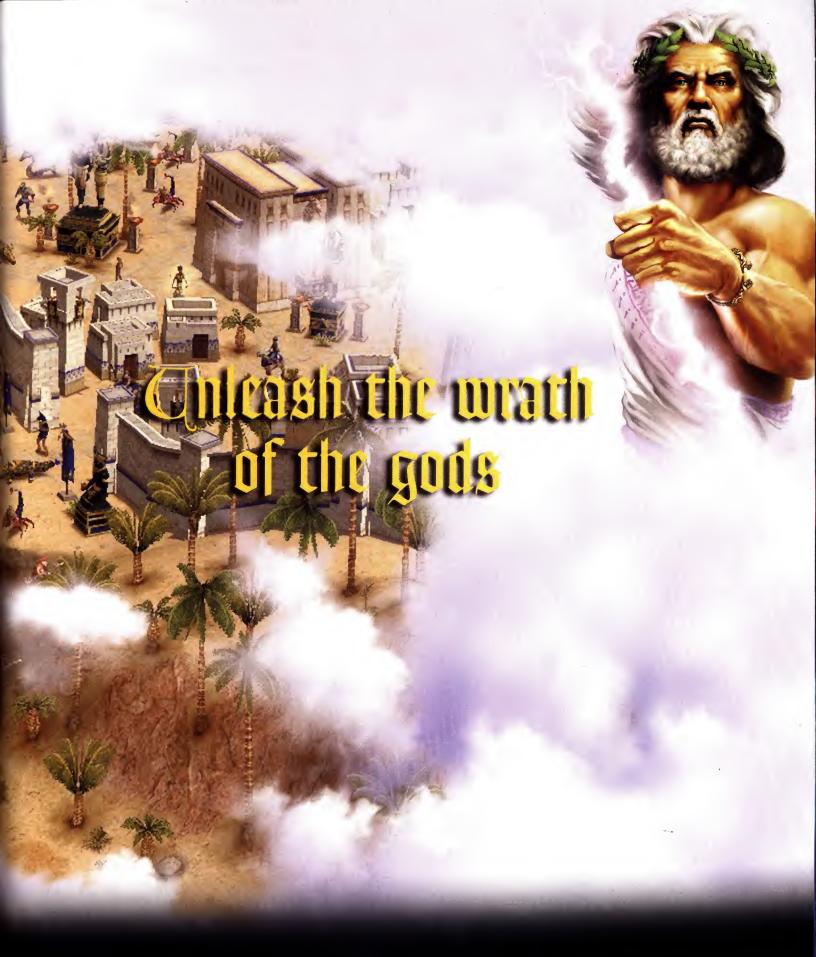
Cauldron • ETA March 2003 • www.chasergame.com

27 | 200
25

21 | 200
24

Unleash the wrath of the gods

Enter a world where legends live on and the will of the gods decide the fate of mortal men.
Build majestic temples, farm the fertile valleys, and seek out wealth in distant realms.
Join brave heroes in the greatest battles of mythology, from the walls of Troy to the gates
of the Underworld. Summon mighty minotaurs to smash enemy citadels,
or call down fire from the skies. *The choice is yours.*

www.agemythology.co.uk

WARREN CHRISMAS **IS...**

COLIN PUNTER BARGAIN HUNTER

Strewth mate, you'd have to have a couple of kangaroos loose in the top paddock to pay top dollar for PC games... says *Warren Chrismas*

HERE'S A POSER: are PC games too expensive? The guys behind Fair Play, who are campaigning for cheaper prices, certainly think so. In truth though, it depends on how much you're paying really, doesn't it? £35? £30? Yeah, right. We know – and you should too – that you can get games cheaper than that if you're prepared to hunt around.

But where should you go to save money? Are specialist game stores cheapest? What kind of price variation is there between different shops? And how much can you expect to save by shopping online? Well, that's what I've been sent to find out.

Obviously we can't check prices in every store in Britain overnight, but to get a snapshot overview I'm taking a trip to Brighton's city centre – which should be fairly typical of an urban jungle in the UK – and then exploring online options. I'll be hunting down three specific titles – Infogrames'

Unreal Tournament 2003 (which, at the time of writing, has been out just a few days), Take 2's *Mafia* (released in September) and EA's *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* (which came out in February and, by now, should be heavily discounted in some places).

It's worth pointing out that all we're interested in here is prices. Sure, issues like quality of service, return policies and delivery times are important, but that's a whole different feature.

"Where should you go to save money? Are specialist game stores cheapest?"

ON THE STREETS

It's Wednesday lunchtime. I'm in Brighton and the hunt is on. For no particular reason, I start at **Argos**, at the far end of Western Road. It takes a while to find the PC games in the catalogue – they're listed in the computer hardware section, not with videogames – and, somewhat predictably, there's only a small handful of titles available. *Unreal Tournament 2003* is £29.99 (not bad at all), but a little sticker advises that it's 'subject to national launch in August'. Er, OK…

I cross the road and go into the branch of **Gamestation**, the rapidly growing independent chain which currently has 63 shops in the UK. Given that I have a clipboard (yes, I do look very sad) and I'm writing down prices I figure it's best to explain what I'm doing to the staff. "If you want quotes you'll have to speak to head office," I'm told. Whatever. Prices here are extremely cheap, although you have to fill in a form with your personal details to join their Bonus Card scheme. *UT2003* and *Mafia* are both just £24.99, with *MoH* at £29.99. There's a pre-owned copy of the latter on shelves at £25.99. I'm told I can

find the others, so I get a member of staff to search on the store's computer. I'm told that *Mafia* is out of stock but would be £29.99. I tell the guy that *Medal Of Honor* doesn't have a 'u' in it, but he ignores me as he types it in. The PS2 version (which doesn't have a 'u' in the name either) is shown on screen, but not the PC edition. "Hmm… that's weird," he says. I suggest the spelling (again), and it appears on screen. £34.99 and in stock – somewhere.

A guy in **Game** gets a bit jumpy when I tell him what I'm doing. "I'll just have to ask the manager," he says as I start noting down prices anyway. All three of the games we're looking for are tagged '£34.99 lowest price guaranteed'. I'm told that Game does price matching, which is news to me. The salesman doesn't seem sure about how close a rival store has to be (I later discover it's a five-mile radius), or how exactly you prove other shops have cheaper prices

"Game does price-matching, though the salesman doesn't seem sure about how close a rival store has to be"

expect £12 cash or £15 or £16 trade-in value if I take in any of our featured titles.

UT2003 and *Mafia* are both £10 more expensive at **Woolworths**, and they don't have *MoH*. Amusingly they have 31 copies of *The Sims Unleashed* on shelves – taking up nearly half of the PC games display – and some of them have an 'out of stock' sticker on them. Also, *Hitman 2* is priced at £29.99 or £34.99, depending on which box you look at. Oh, and the shop stinks of boiled cabbages. I'm outta here.

Compared with most **HMVs**, the selection at the Western Road branch is modest. There are a fair few sale items, but mainly games on budget labels like Sold Out and Xplosiv with a quid or two knocked off. UT2003 is £29.99. I can't

(you tell them, and they'll make a call to check). This seems to suggest that few customers take Game up on their offer – probably because few people know about it. With Gamestation just down the road in Brighton, you should be able to knock down Game's advertised prices by as much as £10. Incidentally, they deal with second-hand console games, but not PC titles. That's to do with licensing. Or something.

WHSmith on Churchill Square has a tiny selection of PC games. It doesn't have *MoH*, but there's a single copy of *UT2003* at £34.99 and *Mafia* is priced £29.99 (still cheaper than Game's advertised price, you'll note). **Dixons** next-door is closed for refurbishment, which rules that out. I could go back

tomorrow – or make a few phone calls – but that wouldn't be in the spirit of this little survey.

I head inside the Churchill Shopping Centre to the **Virgin Megastore**. *UT2003* and *Mafia* are both priced £29.99 and *Medal Of Honor* £34.99 – nothing exceptional – but there's a large range of PC games here across ten racks including lots of budget stuff and special offers. Below a 'New releases as seen in *PC ZONE*' sign, there's a copy of *Sven-Göran Erikkson's World Challenge* (*PCZ* #120, 20%) priced at £7.99. Not sure this is supposed to be here.

I head further into the shopping centre and find another branch of **HMV**. The fact that it – and, indeed, Game – has two stores within five minutes of each other goes some way to explaining why Brighton doesn't have any decent independent game shops in the city centre, I guess. Not surprisingly, the three games we're after are priced exactly the same here as in the Western

Road branch, although they're all available on shelves here. I head to Game's Churchill store and its advertised prices are also the same as their other branch in town.

I head out of the centre and over the road to **MVC** on Air Street. I'm not expecting much here and in this respect I'm not disappointed. *Mafia* is the only game they have out

HIGH STREET COMPARISON

HIGH STREET SHOP	Unreal Tournament 2003	Mafia	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Argos (157-163 Western Road)	£29.99	N/A	N/A
Game (Churchill)	£34.99	£34.99	£34.99
Game (43-44 Western Road)	£34.99	£34.99	£34.99
Gamestation (Western Road)	£24.99	£24.99	£29.99
HMV (Churchill Shopping Centre)	£29.99	£29.99	£34.99
HMV (61-62 Western Road)	£29.99	£29.99	£34.99
MVC (8 Air Street)	N/A	£29.99*	N/A
Virgin Megastore (Churchill Shopping Centre)	£29.99	£29.99	£34.99
WHSmith (Churchill Shopping Centre)	£34.99	£29.99	N/A
Woolworths (185 Western Road)	£34.99	£34.99	N/A
AVERAGE PRICE	£31.66	£31.10	£34.15

Important: all prices as advertised in Brighton stores on October 9 2002.
* MVC cardholder's price (usually £32.99).

Can't wait? Don't wait!

GAMES RETAILER OF THE YEAR WINNER
Golden Joystick Awards 2002
GAMES PCZONE

Gameplay can deliver every NEW game through your door on day of release

TAKE A PEEK AT THIS MONTH'S HOT RELEASES

PC CD-ROM
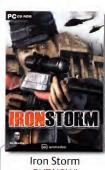
Lord of the Rings: OUT
The Fellowship of the Ring NOW!
ASP £29.99 **£24.99**
Code: RM0686

WWE Raw OUT NOW!
ASP £19.99 **£16.99**
Code: RM0735

Iron Storm OUT NOW!
ASP £29.99 **£25.99**
Code: RM0855

Need for Speed - Hot Pursuit 2 OUT NOW!
ASP £29.99 **£28.99**
Code: RM0716

Medal of Honor Allied Assault Spearhead OUT: 6 Dec
ASP £19.99 **£17.99**
Code: RM0805

James Bond 007 Nightfire OUT: 29 Nov
ASP £34.99 **£32.99**
Code: RM0677

Robot Wars - Extreme Destruction OUT: 22 Nov
ASP £29.99 **£26.99**
Code: RM0685

Civilization III - Play the World OUT: 22 Nov
ASP £19.99 **£16.99**
Code: RM0697

Asheron's Call 2 OUT: 6 Dec
ASP £29.99 **£27.99**
Code: RM0814

RELEASE RADAR Scan our online UK release lists. Then set e-mail alerts that keep you notified of any change of dates. We can't make the games come any quicker but we can at least let you know any date changes as soon as we do. Visit www.gameplay.co.uk to be kept informed.

OVER 3000 products always available

Gameplay is the UK's largest direct to home games specialist

Robin Hood OUT: 15 Nov
ASP £29.99 **£25.99**
Code: RM5027

> **Free Delivery within the UK** > **Nothing to pay until the game is on it's way**

Titles and prices are subject to availability. ASP = anticipated street price. Release dates and prices correct at time of going to press, subject to change without notice. E&OE.

"Buy a cookbook for a relative and the Amazon supercomputers will think you like Jamie Oliver"

of the three and it's £29.99 for members, or £32.99 normal selling price. Where now? I head by the North Laines to **Gametrader**, a tiny shop on Sydney Street. As the name suggests, they mainly deal with second-hand stuff. Of the three titles we're after, *MoH* is the only one they have – at a used price of £19.99. For the record, it would pay £8 cash or £12 trade-in if you wanted to sell it – £10/£15 for newer titles. I'm told that there aren't any other indie stores nearby. It's getting late, so I head for home.

HAVE MODEM, WILL TRAVEL
Time to let my fingers do the walking. Much more agreeable, although of course I'm not actually buying anything here so I don't have that frustrating wait for the goods to arrive. Keep in mind here that the cheapest high street prices I found earlier were £24.99 for *UT2003* and *Mafia*, and £29.99 for *MoH* – all at Gamestation. I should be able to get better deals online, right?

It seems logical to start the online adventure at **Gamestation** (see table below for website addresses). Weird site this – it's so basic that it's not immediately obvious that the company sells games online. It does though, and the games are priced the same as the shops (very cheap) with a modest additional £1 fee for delivery (free for orders over £30) 'within five working days', or £4 for next-day delivery. The snag? You have to phone to check availability – which is rubbish.

Once registered with **Amazon**, they can retain your credit card details so you can order with (almost) a single click. Spookily it remembers stuff you've browsed through, and throws up recommendations. This is great in principle but if you, say, buy a Jamie Oliver cookbook for a relative (you don't like), you can expect similar products recommended to you in the future.

Really, do you want the Amazon supercomputers thinking you like Jamie Oliver? Whatever, prices are reasonable with *Mafia* listed at £24.99 and *UT2003* and *MoH* at £29.99. Postage is £1.99.

At **HMV** our three games are listed at the same prices as the high street stores, but with postage charges on top (£1.80 for one item, £2.30 for two), that's not a great deal. I head to **PC World** and the prices here are, rather surprisingly, even higher. All three are £34.99 and postage is an extra £2.99 (for products under £39.99), with a rather vague promise of delivery 'within four working days'.

Gameplay has a great site with several neat touches (you can set it up to email you when a specific release date changes, for example). Prices are very mixed – *UT2003* is £26.99, *Mafia* £24.99 and *MoH* a rather excessive £32.99. All prices include delivery ('usually sent within one day') so there are no hidden costs. Oh, *Star Trek Klingon Honor Guard* is on special offer at £2.99! Hurry!

There's nothing flashy about **AJG's** website, but at least it's fast. *Mafia* is a reasonable £25.99, *UT2002* a quid more

and *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* £32, with postage included (the latter took a while to find with the search engine because AJG has incorrectly included a 'u' in the name). In contrast **Special Reserve's** website is info overload, with reviews, screenshots, movies and more. It's probably best known for its club (£7.50 a year) which gives you a free gift, catalogues and special offers (see site for details), but you don't have to join to order. *UT2003* is £26.99, *Mafia* £25.99 and **MoH** £32.99, again with postage included. The site says 'Internet prices – even in our shops'

but, really, it's closer to shop prices on the Net.

Registration at **Blockbuster** is pretty tedious (they would like your day, evening *and* mobile phone numbers – tsk!) and isn't really worth the effort given the prices. *UT2003* is £28.99, *Mafia* £25.99 and *MoH* £32.99 – and postage is an additional £1.75.

A search for games at **Jungle** amusingly throws up 'products to make your purchase complete' – not just strategy guides but graphics cards (loads of them), controllers and all sorts of stuff. No thanks. Quoted

Not bad, but don't forget to add the postage charges.

We'll take two please.

ONLINE COMPARISON

WEBSITE	Unreal Tournament 2003	Mafia	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
AJG (www.ajg-games.co.uk)	£26.99	£25.99	£32.00
Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk)	£31.98 (£29.99)	£26.98 (£24.99)	£31.98 (£29.99)
Blockbuster (www.blockbuster.co.uk)	£30.74 (£28.99)	£27.74 (£25.99)	£34.74 (£32.99)
Game (www.game.uk.com)	£31.24 (£29.99)	£31.24 (£29.99)	£36.24 (£34.99)
Gameplay (www.gameplay.co.uk)	£26.99	£24.99	£32.99
Gamestation (www.gamestation.co.uk)	£25.99 (£24.99)	£25.99 (£24.99)	£30.99 (£29.99)
HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	£31.79 (£29.99)	£31.79 (£29.99)	£36.79 (£34.99)
Jungle (www.jungle.com)	£28.97 (£25.99)	£27.96 (£24.98)	£32.47 (£29.49)
PC World (www.pcworld.co.uk)	£37.98 (£34.99)	£37.98 (£34.99)	£37.98 (£34.99)
Play (www.play.com)	£26.99	£22.99	£27.99
Simply Games (www.simplygames.com)	£24.99*	£23.99*	£28.99*
Special Reserve (www.specialreserve.net)	£26.99	£25.99	£32.99
AVERAGE PRICE (DELIVERED)	£29.30	£27.80	£33.01

Important: prices shown are totals including standard (cheapest) delivery and VAT, accurate on October 10 2002. Advertised prices in brackets. *Free postage for limited time – usually £1.50 extra.

RIP-OFF BRITAIN?
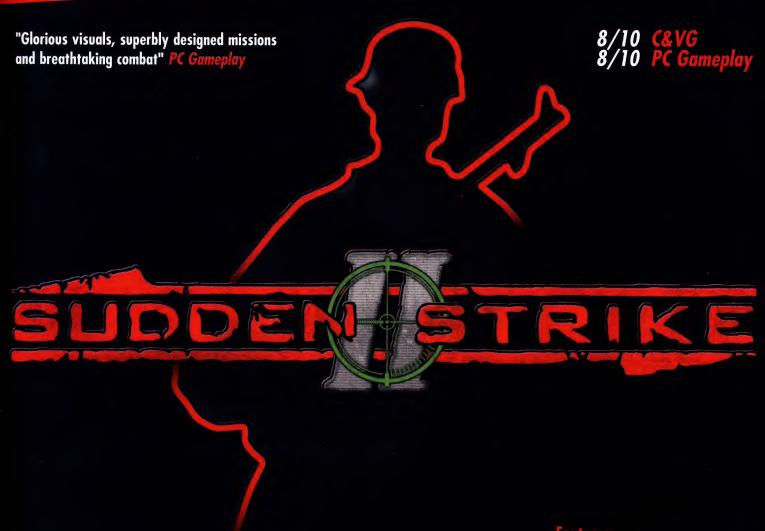
ARE PC GAMES REALLY MORE EXPENSIVE HERE?

We were curious to see how the price of games in Britain compares to America and Europe. It's not practical to do a full survey of retailers in each country, but the prices below from Amazon's online stores in the UK, US, France and Germany provide a simple comparison. The conclusion? The prices are pretty much the same. Good job we didn't waste any more time on that then, eh?

AMAZON PRICES AROUND THE WORLD

	Unreal Tournament 2003	Mafia	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
France	EUR 47.99 (£30.25)	EUR 45.50 (£28.68)	EUR 50.05 (£31.54)
Germany	EUR 44.99 (£28.35)	EUR 44.99 (£28.35)	EUR 49.99 (£31.50)
UK	£29.99	£24.99	£29.99
USA	$44.99 (£28.77)	$44.99 (£28.77)	$44.99 (£28.77)

Important: all are advertised prices (without taxes and postage) at Amazon as of October 10 2002. Conversion into pounds intended as rough guide only.

prices are reasonable (*UT2003* £25.99, *Mafia* £24.98, *MoH* £29.49) but don't include delivery. There are two different postage categories – for 'Music/DVD/Video' there's a one-off charge of £1.50 plus 29p per item but, bizarrely, PC games fall into the 'other' category which has a charge of £2.99 for orders under £100. Even more bizarre is that carriage is shown as £2.54 plus VAT on the payment screen… and that actually works out to £2.98. You might want to look further into this before ordering from Jungle. My head hurts.

Arrrgh! My head hurts even more looking at **Simply Games'** messy website, but there's no arguing with the prices. *Mafia* is £23.99, *UT2003* just a pound more, and *MoH* £28.99 (again, it's spelt incorrectly). This is the cheapest I've found so far – for all three games. The snag? Two of the games aren't in stock as I write (they're listed as available 'within 3-7 days'), and while postage is currently free due to a special promotion, it's usually £1.50 extra. Very good, all the same. *UT2003* and *Mafia* are listed at £29.99 at **Game's** website – £5 cheaper than their high street stores – with *MoH* at the same £34.99. Postage is extra, though – £1.25 for delivery within two business days, or £4.95 for next-day (if you order before 2pm).

Finally, it's off to **Play**. I've intentionally left it till last, because I know I'll end up browsing the ridiculously cheap DVDs for hours (and I do). Games here are low-priced too – *UT2003* is £26.99 (a little more than Simply Games), but the others are the cheapest we've found, with *Mafia* at just £22.99 and *MoH* (spelt wrong!) at £27.99. And, yes, these prices include delivery. Very impressive.

CALCULATOR TIME
So what have we learnt here? Well, firstly, a reminder that by the time you read this all the price information will be well out of date. And we concede that if we did the same survey in December, we might find some of retailers mentioned fare a little better, some worse, and obviously we haven't covered *every* games store in Britain here. But that's not the point – our main aim here was to show that games can be picked up for

much cheaper than many people think. There's a huge variation in prices – and you should be aware of it.

On the high street the three PC games we were looking out for – even *Medal of Honor,* which has been out a fair while – were all priced £29.99 or £34.99 at all the stores we visited except Gamestation. Why no quid off here and there? One can only assume the big chains don't want a price war. But with Gamestation undercutting the prices at more established stores by as much as £10 that's probably what we're going to see over coming months. Bad news for their accountants, good news for us punters. (Incidentally the Gamestation chain was bought out by Blockbuster a few days after our research. Fingers crossed that they keep their prices low.)

It's a very different story online. Here, retailers know you can easily compare prices and switch from one site to another with a couple of mouse clicks. As a result, there's a much wider range of prices – and very big savings to be made. In fact, the variation in prices is truly shocking. Buy *Mafia* for £22.99 inclusive from Play rather than PC World (£37.98), for example, and you'll save yourself an incredible £14.99. That's a massive 39 per cent cheaper!

And it's not just older games. Even in its first week of release *Unreal Tournament 2003* could be bought from several different stores for under £27 – a fair way from the oft-quoted 'typical' price of £34.99 for PC games. The message is simple: shop around and you won't get ripped off. Really, it's a jungle out there. PCZ

It's a jungle out there – watch you don't pay over the odds.

Shop around and you'll save yourself a lot of money.

PC GAMES FOR HIRE

IF YOU'RE ONLY GOING TO PLAY A GAME FOR A FEW DAYS, YOU DON'T NEED TO ACTUALLY BUY IT…

Why buy when you can rent?

Blockbuster loans out videogames but, disappointingly, not PC titles. Apparently they tried it a couple of years ago but 'it didn't work out'.

You can, however, rent games from the comfort of your own cesspit thanks to Loan Gamer. It allows you to borrow games for five days for £4.75/£5.75 including delivery (games are sent first class and a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope is provided), but there's also an Unlimited Rental scheme. Here you pay a flat £19.99 each month and can borrow two games for as long as you want, again with all postage paid for. When you send a game back, the next on your want

list is sent to you (or the next one down, if it's not available). You can swap games as many times as you like during a month and cancel membership with 30 days notice. If you play a lot of games, this looks like an excellent deal. Visit www.loangamer.co.uk for more details, and check out our competition to win a free subscription on page 39.

Of course many high street chains run loan schemes – of sorts – thanks to 10/14-day 'no quibble' money back guarantees on game purchases. But keep in mind that store staff might get a little suspicious if you try taking back, say, three games in a single week…

SKINFLINT

TEN WAYS TO SAVE MONEY ON PC GAMES

1 Shop around for bargains. Really, you should have got the message by now.
2 Buy online rather than from the high street. Learn to wait patiently by your letterbox for the postman's knock.
3 Wait for the price to come down, or the sequel to come out. *FIFA 2000* is now very cheap…
4 Buy 'pre-owned' games from shops. Gamestation buys and sells used games, and so do many independents.
5 Buy and sell privately. Check your local paper and eBay (www.ebay.co.uk).
6 Check to see if your favourite store does price-matching with other stores.
7 Ask your local store if they do student discount. Some give ten per cent off.
8 Borrow rather than buy (see PC Games For Hire panel).
9 Become a games journalist. We get games for free. Some of them are even quite good.
10 Pirate games… and you'll burn in hell. Don't say we didn't warn you.

WIN! ALL THE GAMES COMPETITION
YOU HAVE EVER WANTED TO PLAY – FREE!

OK, so we've given you a few pointers on where and how to find the cheapest PC games, but what if you don't want to loosen your miserly grip on your hard-earned wodge at all? Well, fear not, because as usual *PC ZONE* has the answer

PICTURE THIS... Any game you could ever want to play, from a selection of hundreds of the best PC games, available to you for as long as you want and delivered to your door for free. It may sound crazy, but this is the new deal from Loan-gamer.co.uk, the UK's first online games rental company. Their brand new Unlimited Games Rentals service allows you to rent as many games as you want and keep them for as long as you want (there are no late fees) all for one monthly fee. Normally it costs £19.99 per month (just half the price of one game!), but thanks to our friends at Loan Gamer, *PC ZONE* is giving away a FREE 6-month subscription to five lucky readers.

All you have to do is answer this simple question and send it to us on the back of a postcard, and you could soon be enjoying free access to as many games as you can play, delivered to your door for free.

QUESTION Which member of the *PC ZONE* staff recently cut off his girly locks?

And remember, if you can't wait to win a prize or you're one of those wretched sorts that never win anything, check out www.loan-gamer.co.uk or call 08454 58 58 85 to take advantage of the new game loan service.

Answer the question(s) and send them on a postcard, along with with all the following information:
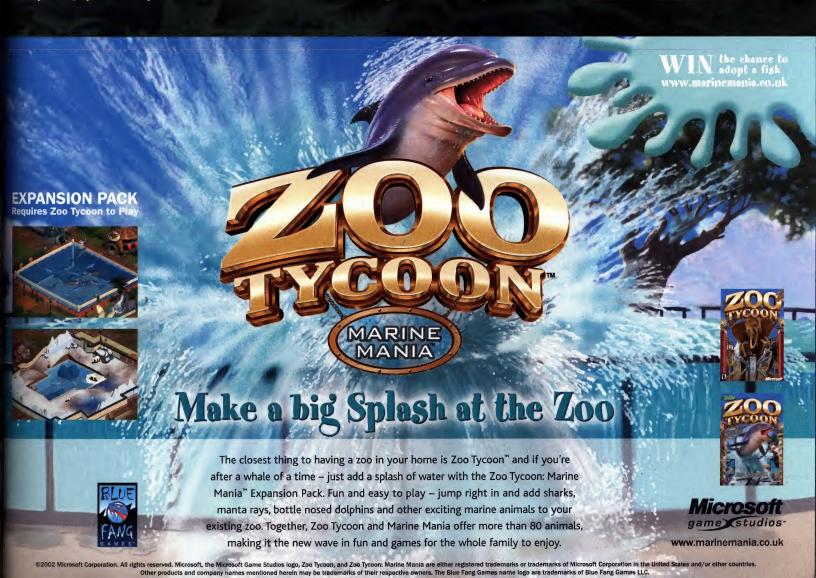
■ Title, Forename, Surname, Address, Postcode, Daytime phone number and your email address
■ Please indicate on the postcard if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd Ltd
■ Please indicate on the postcard if you are under 18 years of age
■ Please indicate if you are you a current subscriber

Send your entry to: Loan Gamer Competition, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: December 12 2002)

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helvecios
Noblemen (9/12)
3000 / 3000
750/750

Rule Britannia…
PRAETORIANS

A Roman RTS of orgiastic proportions?
Richie Shoemaker talks tactics with the
head centurion and puts the latest
playable code through its paces

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.praetoriansgame.com
OUT February 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ The epic battles of *Medieval*
combined with the ease and
accessibility of *Command & Conquer*
■ Fast-paced battles that centre
on tactics rather than winning
through superior numbers
■ Interesting and unique special units
■ Beautiful 3D environments, without
the hassle of a 3D interface
■ By the makers of *Commandos*

Famous Roman leaders like Julius Caesar and Biggus Dickus won't be making an appearance.

ROBBIE LEFT Take That, Geri expelled herself from the Spice Girls and now the square-jawed creator of the *Commandos* series, Gonzo Suarez, has packed up his pencils and vacated the offices of Spain's most prolific games developer, along with seven of his most trusted allies.

You would have thought such a mass departure would spell doom for one of Europe's most respected games studios. After all, the last great high-profile exodus from a games developer saw a similarly sized squad of talent leave Ion Storm – and we all know what happened to *Daikatana* as a result. This time things are different we're told. Gonzo and his fellow escapees from Camp Pyro worked solely on *Commandos* and left only when the recent console conversion was complete. If any game's going to suffer, it's the third in the classic WWII series, due some time next year. *Praetorians*, it seems, is safe.

"It is fairly common for some people to move on to other endeavours after finishing a project, so from the point of view of Pyro Studios, eight people leaving is not an issue," says Javier Arévalo, project leader on *Praetorians*. "They had no involvement in *Praetorians* and from a more personal perspective, I'm very happy for them. I hope they are very successful in their new challenge."

That's that sorted out then.

ROME SWEET ROME
Having spent the six years of its short history wrapped up in World War II,

Praetorians is quite a departure for the Madrid developer. It's set during the most turbulent times of the Roman Empire, a period when imperial expansion was rampant, Egyptian power was on the wane and turmoil was mounting from within. At first glance the game appears a more traditional real-time strategy game compared to the *Commandos* trilogy. Rather than a handful of specialist soldiers, *Praetorians* will allow players the opportunity to control thousands of Roman, Egyptian and Barbarian troops, across 3D battlefields set as far apart as North Africa, Britannia and Central Europe. Rather than sneaking behind enemy lines, the aim is simply to push them further back, by raining down arrows on the enemy ranks, charging them with your finest warriors and seizing their strongholds with the help of ladders, towers and catapults.

"Ancient times have something that makes them extremely attractive as a setting," says Arévalo. "From a gaming perspective, there's a lot of inspiration to be found in massive armies and epic military campaigns, without the need to resort to alternate realities with wizards, dragons and other fantasy creatures. We wanted to do a full-scale strategy game inspired by historical reality."

"Well over a thousand tiny men in skirts will parade across a map at any one time"

There's no fog of war – you can see the whole map, but enemy units and neutral buildings will remain hidden.

Because of this streamlined approach to army management, much more thought has gone into tactics and formations – a feature that has been sorely lacking from Roman-themed games in the past, especially considering that this is what the legions of Rome were famous for.

"During pre-production of the game we did a lot of research on ancient armies to see how they actually fought," says Arévalo. "We were amazed at the amount of tactics and procedures that the Romans developed to manage their huge armies. This was the main driving force behind the personalities we have given to the three different civilisations; Romans, Barbarians and Egyptians."

THREE TRIBES GO TO WAR
The differences between the three

FORMATIVE PEERS
Of course, there's no shortage of strategy games on PC that take inspiration from ancient history, but where *Praetorians* differs from the likes of *Civilization*, *Age Of Empires* and *Caesar III* is that it centres its attentions on the art of destruction rather than economic development. Housing villagers, setting up trade routes and developing new technologies is completely off the menu, but if the thought of not being able to set tax rates or send your peasants off to chop wood worries you, be assured that when it comes to the field of battle, *Praetorians* is way ahead of the competition.

Unlike most strategy games, *Praetorians'* units come ready-grouped into squads of 30 men, which can in turn be split into two groups of 15. With well over a thousand tiny men in skirts parading across a map at any one time, it makes a lot of sense that they are. In similar fashion to *Shogun* and *Medieval*, this means that if you click on a soldier, the entire unit he belongs to comes into play. Unlike more traditional RTS games, you're not forced to drag a box around individual men and fiddle with shortcuts to get them to do anything meaningful.

TEAM TIME

WHAT DOES *PRAETORIANS* HAVE IN STORE FOR THE MULTIPLAYER FAN?

Pyro is keeping it simple on the subject of the multiplayer game, with eight-player LAN/online games fitted as standard, and battles that focus solely on the simple aim of eliminating the enemy. If you can't find enough players to sign up, then you can elect to have CPU players filling the slots, and if you're completely cut off from the online world, a Skirmish mode will be included too.

"The multiplayer portion is essentially a team deathmatch type of game," says Javier Arévalo. "Free-for-all is supported as well, but I personally find the more controlled team battles a lot more fun."

With the Empire in turmoil, players will end up fighting alongside former enemies in order to defeat rebellious legions.

Ally yourself with AI commanders in skirmish or multiplayer games.

sides are much more than just cosmetic. The Romans, being more organised and highly trained, can be ordered into a number of varied formations to maximise their impact. Archers can be lined up into a slow-moving but effective firing formation, with the front ranks kneeling to allow those behind a clear field of fire. Legionnaires can make use of the infamous 'turtle' formation, essentially a human tank with shields covering every flank, making the unit virtually invulnerable to attack from other infantry.

By comparison, the Barbarians, a general amalgamation of Gaul, Celt and Germanic tribes, are completely different, being strong, fast and prone to rushing in en masse. Whereas Roman leaders can make use of a number of special formations, the Barbarian chief can employ skirmish tactics, or simply command his troops to shout a lot as they rush into the fray. The Egyptians are, as you would expect, somewhere between the

Greetings to the Roman People: we have come to help Caesar to fight out common enemies, the Helvetii.

What have the Romans ever done for us? Apart from the catapult ladder...

two extremes, with perhaps a greater emphasis on ranged and cavalry combat.

TIDY LITTLE UNIT

Apart from the different sides and the tactics that they specialise in, *Praetorians* also introduces a number of unique and interesting units. The backbone of any army is its rank and file grunts, but in *Praetorians* they also double up as engineers, able to hastily build bridges or erect ladders and siege weapons while camped outside a fortress.

Scout units are particularly distinct from what we're used to. Instead of going through the palaver of guiding a lone cavalry unit across the map to lift the fog of war, you have scouts that are accompanied by animals that can be used to scope out the land ahead.

Clearly inspired by the cinematic classic *Beastmaster*, scouts can either release a trained hawk to spy from above, or a wolf

that will pad into the forest and sniff out an ambush hiding within. Though we're dubious as to whether such methods were actually employed, the inclusion of such units is sure to make for an original

Some battles are based on actual skirmishes that occurred over 2,000 years ago.

experience. We're willing to let historical accuracy slide on this one.

GRAPHICUS MAXIMUS

Graphically, of course, *Praetorians* looks splendid, perhaps not as wildly attractive as *Battle Realms* or as detailed as the imminent *Age Of Mythology*, but far more impressive in terms of landscape and the sheer numbers of soldiers that the 3D engine can handle. Lines of troops wheel around the meandering tracks like finely drilled soldiers on parade, and if you care to order a group of engineers to build a siege ladder, they'll hunch over its construction, pick it up when complete and carry it to the front line through massed ranks of infantry – who'll actually shuffle out of the way to boot.

Though relatively small, the maps are tightly packed with dangerous forests, scarred with rocks and awash with beautifully flowing water. March across a stream and your troops will leave ripples in their wake. Take them though the forest and wildlife will scatter, with deer taking flight and birds flitting into the sky. Apart from looking superb, such actions have an important bearing on the action – if you see branches swaying and birds suddenly taking to the sky, you can bet the enemy are in there somewhere waiting for you to stroll by.

Perhaps most impressive of all are the siege battles. Instruct a unit of men to enter a siege tower and they won't just suddenly disappear off the map, but visibly climb aboard, while other soldiers push the wooden tower towards the enemy ramparts. If they make it, gangplanks are let down and the soldiers pour out to engage the enemy on the battlements. It's painstaking details such as this, seemingly insignificant on the face of it, that look set to ensure that the game captures your imagination.

VILLAGE PEOPLE

Although the battles are the cornerstone on which *Praetorians* has been built, Pyro hasn't completely done away with the concept of resource management. Rather than gold, iron or food, generals simply have to look after their supply of troops, which means sallying forth and securing a local village from which to recruit fresh blood. Each village is home to around 200 people, and by building a garrison on the outskirts of town and sending your Centurion in to take over,

Enemies can hide deep in forests where even hawks can't spot them.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

A 3D STRATEGY GAME WHERE YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT THE CAMERA… COULD IT BE TRUE?

There are many who shy away from 3D strategy games, generally because you have to battle with the interface just as fiercely as the enemy. Few 3D RTS games have managed to get the balance right, and no matter how good the interface, none have ever matched the simplicity offered by 2D or isometric games like *Red Alert*. *Praetorians*, despite being in full 3D, is very much a 2D game in terms of the control method, since the camera is fixed in one direction. Far from being restrictive, it actually makes the game far easier to get to grips with and has the added benefit of offering very detailed terrain, probably because your graphics card doesn't have to keep working out where to put everything every five milliseconds.

Of course this is no great innovation – *Warcraft III* and *Age Of Mythology* employ similar systems, as will the forthcoming *SimCity 4*. Of the big RTS franchises then, only *C&C* is yet to come to the party, and we've yet to see how the camera in *Generals* ends up. Still, it seems clear that 3D fixed perspective is the way ahead.

It's back to basics for the new breed of 3D strategy games.

you can bleed the population dry by press-ganging every able-bodied man into service. Auxiliary Infantry, the mainstay of your force, are relatively quick to train, while pikemen, archers, legionnaires and praetorian guardsman can take at least three times longer to train up.

It's a shame however that Pyro couldn't see their original vision through. Ideas touted back when the game was first announced included horses as well as soldiers. To create cavalry units you had to find and train wild horses, or perhaps even massacre them to keep your enemy from making use of them. There was also a feature planned whereby you could take enemy prisoners and either conscript them into your front line force or use them, quite literally, as cannon fodder.

"I think these features were distracting from the real core of the *Praetorians* gameplay so we removed them," says Arévalo. "We toyed with the idea of adding some naval elements too, but they felt too artificial somehow and in the end we decided to abandon them completely."

The words expansion and pack spring immediately to mind.

THE RISE OF ROME

Though *Praetorians* perhaps lacks the scope of the *Total War* series, the prospect of another game on a similar scale, yet with smoothly animated 3D units, impressive ease of use and tactical opportunities that even *Medieval* lacked is certainly one worth savouring. But Javier Arévalo thinks *Praetorians* has still more up its sleeve:

Javier Arévalo, project leader on *Praetorians*, on some of the finer points of the game…

PCZ The Romans were famed for their orgies. Are there any scenes of gratuitous sex in the game?
JA *Praetorians* is a game for the general public, so we have kept the darkest corners of the Roman behaviour under wraps. (*He grins*).

PCZ Have you taken any inspiration from films such as *Spartacus*, *Gladiator* or *Carry On Cleo*?
JA *Spartacus*, *Gladiator*, *Cleopatra* and many other movies and books about the Roman Empire have all been very valuable sources for visual design. I'm not sure about *Carry On Cleo* though.

PCZ Which is your favourite unit?
I love all the units for the personality they have, but I'm personally very fond of the *Praetorian* unit (the design of which has been somewhat controversial) because they are great at keeping my archers safe. Scouts are a radically new approach that people are going to love, and the way infantry operates the siege machines are very cool.

PCZ What's your favourite RTS game of all time?
JA My personal favourite is *Total Annihilation*. I think it gave a completely new approach to RTS gaming, and I hope that a developer in the future, Chris Taylor himself perhaps, revives its ideas. (*Keep up man, TA2 is currently in development at Phantagram – Ed.*)

PCZ Which RTS game are you most looking forward to playing?
JA Why, *Praetorians* of course! I'm looking forward to playing multiplayer against all these incredibly good strategy players out there, although I'm pretty sure I will get crushed by many of them. Some people are just so good at figuring out tactics and combining forces into a totally devastating army, in ways that we never thought of.

"The initial perception of the game is that of a classic RTS, with intuitive interface and control system," he says. "But once you start to play the missions you quickly notice that the gameplay experience is radically different. Our novel approach to resource management and the effect of terrain features in the approach to battles creates a wholly new type of game. Many strategy gamers will recognise stuff that they have always wanted to do in other RTS games but never could. Couple this with the very attractive historical setting and the powerful graphics engine that allows us to portray the terrain and units with great detail, and you have a game that I believe most strategy gamers will enjoy from beginning to end." **PCZ**
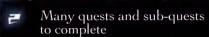
Would the real Slim Shady please stand up, please stand up...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digitalo
PUBLISHER HD Interactive
WEBSITE www.devastationgame.com
ETA January 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Uses a heavily modified version of the latest *Unreal* engine
■ Hugely interactive environment, with significant consequences for gameplay
■ Massive array of weapons, including some clever new devices
■ Multiplayer focused, but with extensive single-player campaign

Razing expectations...
DEVASTATION

It looks good, but is this the next *UT* or just another me-too gunfest? *Anthony Holden* sifts through the rubble

IT'S NO SECRET that we love shooters at *PC ZONE*. Multiplayer ones even more so. If you were to pop in on us during any given lunchtime (though we'd really rather you didn't), chances are you'd find us hammering away at our WASD keys, red eyes fixed on pinpoint reticules, hurling sporadic abuse across the office at each other (mostly good-natured... at least since the counselling).

But as much as we look forward to each new shooter that comes along, there's no escaping the realisation that most of them don't matter. You've got your top tier of shooters – the kind that sit in our A-List for years and hog Internet bandwidth the world over – and then you've got the also-rans, the games that,

rather than setting the world on fire, merely throw a match into a pile of soggy towels on the world's bathroom floor.

EDGE OF CHAOS

At this point in time, Digitalo's forthcoming shooter *Devastation* is interesting, not only because it looks extremely fine, but because it's one of the games that could go either way. On the one hand, with its *Unreal*-powered good looks, clever object physics and host of cool weapons, it seems deserving of a slice of the online pie. On the other, barely anyone's heard of it and it's up against the likes of *UT2003*.

It's a sticky spot to be in, but when we caught up with developer Digitalo there was no shortage of confidence. We asked

> **"Smacking a trooper with the 2x4 plank makes you feel like Jack Nicholson"**
>
> **VIC DELEON**
> SENIOR PRODUCER

Two trailer park girls go round the outside.

It feels so empty without me...

Mama, I never meant to hurt you, I never meant to make you cry.

Vic DeLeon, senior producer on the game, where they get the nerve.

"We've learned a lot from our previous projects. We worked on *Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone* last year, mostly on technical and visual level design. We also made a *UT* add-on pack, which sadly was cancelled just shy of its completion, but it was a key experience that got us where we are today regardless."

With such high-profile projects under their belts, the Digitalo lads have clearly been on the verge of recognition for some time. And with *Devastation*, a gritty shooter with a post-apocalyptic edge, they may have found the perfect vehicle to show off their talents. "One of the things we're most proud of is the depiction of the real-world locales in the game," confers Vic. "It's set in the near future, a dark age in which huge corporations rule with an iron fist. You play the leader of a small Resistance formed to combat the corporations and their Pacification Squads. They're not your typical characters, they're paranoid losers and criminals – they reflect the desperation of a future with no hope." A bit darker than the likes of *Harry Potter*, then.

GOING SOLO

Of course all this resistance leader guff only happens in the single-player campaign, while *Devastation* is focused primarily on multiplayer action. However,

Vic is keen for us not to dismiss the single-player game outright. "It is very substantial, and although it prepares players for the kind of action and combat you'll face in the multiplayer campaigns, it stands on its own. You'll meet up with many sidekicks, travel the world, battle regiments of PacSquad troopers, sabotage corporate operations, and uncover a corporate conspiracy that threatens what's left of the ravaged world. There are 20 massive levels set in four different territories, so it's around a 15-25 hour play-through."

We've actually played some of these massive levels, albeit incomplete, and they do have quite a distinctive feel to them. The nature of the objectives is generally straightforward (something akin to the object-based multiplayer in *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*), and with the addition of AI wingmen, you sometimes feel like you're playing a kind of multiplayer fragfest with bots. Strangely, it's the very obviously programmed nature of the enemies that could counter such feelings – they are just far too human. Vic explains: "One of the goals of *Devastation*'s AI was to move away from trying to simulate human players playing on servers, to emulating what a real-life human would do in our world. That means no enemies strafe-walking while getting ready to rocket-jump to that next ledge.

Instead, you'll see them engage you when appropriate, trying to take cover, possibly running to get reinforcements, or just plain freaking out and running away."

SHIFTING CONDITIONS

Another key facet of the gameplay is its incorporation of interactive object physics. Roll exploding barrels at enemies, make a shiv out of a discarded bottle, drag heavy objects across

doorways to make a sniping position more secure – the consequences for gameplay are vast. Of course it's all made possible by *Unreal* technology, but *Devastation* is the first game to apply it in any truly interesting ways.

Another key ingredient in the game's make-up is the vast preponderance of weaponry. More than 40 weapons will be available in total, including rifles, shotguns, handguns and blades of every description, not to mention the much-touted rat drone: a remote-control spy-rat fitted with a C4 payload.

Pushed to name his favourite weapon, however, Vic is rather more down to earth: "The coolest weapon, if not the deadliest, is the 2x4 wooden plank! Smacking an orderly-trooper in the Asylum level makes you feel like Jack Nicholson in a new *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*."

Ultimately, it's memorable touches such as this that are going to make or break *Devastation*. At heart it's pretty much a straightforward shooter, but given a certain vigour by the addition of many small tweaks and surprises. Whether this is enough to secure a spot alongside the likes of *UT2003* and *CS* is another question – we'll keep you posted. **PCZ**

CV

digitalo

DIGITALO STUDIOS

As a serious venture, Digitalo Studios is still young, though the team has been working on mods and hobby projects for many years.

1999 Digitalo completes the VRND project, a virtual reality model of Notre-Dame Cathedral using *Unreal* technology.

2001 EA contracts them to help on *Harry Potter & The Sorcerer's Stone*, mainly in the areas of level design and in-game cinematics.

2001 Digitalo all but completes an official *Unreal Tournament* add-on, but it is cancelled before release.
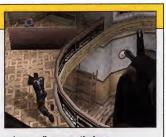

TERRITORIAL HACKING

A NEW MULTIPLAYER VARIATION THAT HASN'T BEEN TRIED BEFORE? CAN'T BE...

Apart from existing favourites such as CTF, Deathmatch and Team DM, *Devastation* introduces a brand new multiplayer mode called Territories. It's a team-based affair based on the destruction of spawn points – a bit of a remix of existing game types but quite cool-sounding nonetheless.

"The game begins with two bases, yours and the enemy's," explains Vic DeLeon. "Inside each base is a destructible spawn point, and you'll need to co-ordinate attacks on the enemy base and its defences to destroy it. In order to get into the enemy base, you'll have to hack your way into the public mainframe and get their security codes, relay the information to your team and use them to bring down your enemy's defence perimeters. Of course, the enemy team will be trying to do the same thing to your base." Once you've done all this, you can pile in and blow up the enemy Spawner, then proceed to hunt down any remaining enemies. However, if they survive and manage to destroy your Spawner as well, the game becomes a last man standing affair. "It can get quite intense, and smart, strategic teams will do well," adds Vic. "We can't wait to see how the community receives it."

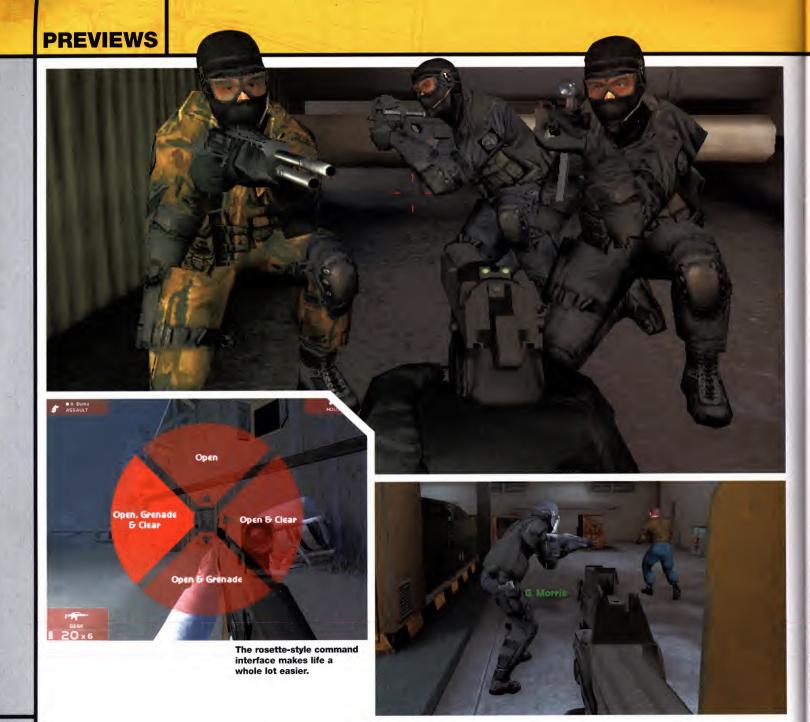The rosette-style command interface makes life a whole lot easier.

Crack insertions...

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

Mark Hill breaks radio silence for an exclusive hands-on with the blistering new *Rainbow Six* game

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The *Rainbow Six* series has a tradition of combining realism with tense, exciting gameplay
- It uses the latest Unreal engine
- Vastly improved AI, especially for your team mates
- Easier planning and on-the-fly command interface

TERRORISM has been on our minds a lot in the last year or so. From the sporadic actions of small groups of individuals it has turned into a global threat, replacing the atom bomb as the new spectre of fear and paranoia in our otherwise cosy existences. But since we can't do a hell of a lot about this in real life, we may as well keep playing games in which we can pretend, eh?

The *Rainbow Six* series has made a living out of the "safe" sort of terrorism that takes over embassies, kidnaps businessmen and stands outside doors waiting to have a cap popped in its head, and *Raven Shield* is no exception. Where it differs from past incarnations though is in the way it's presented to you. Up until now, the developers could get away with confusing interfaces and shabby, angular

graphics, safe in the knowledge that the tension and realism would suck the punters in anyway. These days the market for strategic shooters is that much more crowded, and *Raven Shield* is a far more well-groomed beast.

It's apparent right from the opening menus just how much effort has gone into making this game easy on the eye, and that's before you're thrust into the

It's worth paying attention when you shoot someone, just to see the animations.

Either that was a terrorist or we've got some more explaining to do.

thick of the action courtesy of the ubiquitous Unreal engine. *Ghost Recon* has already given us a taster of how much the Red Storm formula could benefit from good graphics, but *Raven Shield* makes the likes of *Rogue Spear* and even the recent *Sum Of All Fears* look like amateurish efforts.

Just watching your squad move around, turn their heads and blink is a joy in itself, and it's certainly much more satisfying shooting at enemies who look like the real thing and fall in unnatural – if completely realistic – ways against walls and down stairs. The environments are also pretty gorgeous, from industrial factories and clinical airports to hot locales and rocky mountains.

SMOOTH MOVES
Something we found even more refreshing, however, was how the Unreal engine makes moving about and shooting feel much smoother and more natural, without the clunkiness of previous games.

And, in a giant concession to a wider audience, you can at last see the weapon in your hand instead of just a floating reticule. All of which should extend the *Rainbow Six* fan base well beyond the realism nuts.

A SIMPLE PLAN
Another important step towards bringing the game closer to a wider first-person shooter audience is the complete overhauling of the planning stages. Aware that many people – including myself – couldn't be arsed with all those red and blue lines criss-crossing each other over flat representations of buildings, *Raven Shield* makes it much easier to forgo the planning altogether and jump straight into the action. You just pick your team, get them kitted up and start exploring the lush environments and ridding them of evil tangos.

The hardcore audience – the kind who actually spend hours planning each phase of the mission on a blackboard and prefer

"Raven Shield makes it much easier to forgo the planning and jump straight into the action"

to sit back watching their brilliant strategies play out rather than testing their reflexes – will find the interface much easier to use. Laying down waypoints and setting specific orders for each stage can all be done with a few clicks. More impressive though, is the way the abstract 2D sketches have been replaced by detailed three-dimensional maps, making things much more enjoyable and intuitive – they even tempted me to drop a few waypoints from time to time.

Even if you're part of the crowd that prefers blood-splattered walls to complex diagrams, you can't shy away from tactics

altogether. After all, this isn't a brainless shooter, it's a highly tactical *Rainbow Six* game, where any John Wayne antics will leave you lying in a pool of your own brains before you know what the hell's going on. Even if you ignore the planning altogether or choose one of the predefined strategies, you'll definitely need

to give commands to your squad during the actual gameplay.

FEEL THE FEAR
It's still a stealthy kind of combat though. You have to move slowly, feeling the tension tighten with every step, your throat dry with the fear of a bullet coming from any of the dozen hiding places the enemy could be in. And, as with the rest of the titles in the series, bullets rarely wound, they leave you stone cold dead. What's more, the AI now seems to be far more aware of this potential. Whenever we caught them with their pants down, they were just as likely to run screaming as they were to spray bullets at us. All NPCs have their own predispositions, making each game totally unpredictable.

The game is still two or three months from completion, but from the handful of missions we've played it all looks extremely accomplished. The formula is intact, but it's been thoroughly polished in all the right places. With the team AI also improved beyond recognition, *Raven Shield* looks set to create a new benchmark for tactical shooters.

I LIKE KIT

LADIES TAKE NOTE: *RAVEN SHIELD* OFFERS A FULL RANGE OF ACCESSORIES

It doesn't have the RPG-esque points system of *Ghost Recon* (which is a shame), but the gear screen in *Raven Shield* still takes us back to glory days of *X–COM*, with a huge array of clobber to offer your team.

There are mini-scopes, heartbeat sensors, thermal scopes, dozens of pistols, rifles and machine guns and, for the frustrated Ken and Barbie fan in us all, a wide range of uniforms.

There's also much more freedom to pick and mix, since there are no restrictions as to what any of your characters can use. So, for example, an assault officer will be able to use a sniper rifle if you wish, or a sniping expert a heavy machine gun. They'll probably be completely useless, but it's nice to have the choice.

Gun fetishists will still have plenty to lick their lips about.
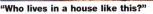
"Who lives in a house like this?"

So where is everyone?

Mum's been to Iceland.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sunflowers/Max Design
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE www.anno1503.com
OUT February 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The original sold millions
- Mainly in Germany
- This one's three times bigger
- With a brand new engine

History today...

UPDATE

ANNO 1503 – THE NEW WORLD

Real-time strategy in the 16th Century? *Steve Hill* explores

"To broaden the game's appeal, the developers have introduced more barbaric acts of sickening violence"

THE BIGGEST selling PC game in Germany may be a plaudit to rival the best-dressed man at a trainspotter's convention, but 1999's *Anno 1602* is the proud holder of that dubious claim. World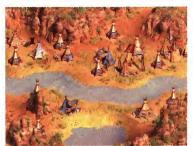wide it shifted more than two million copies, and according to EA's press release, "captured the hearts and minds of gamers everywhere". That might be stretching the point somewhat, but it was nevertheless an enjoyable example of the time-honoured rural resource epic, with all the log chopping and empire building the genre entails.

Four years on, and hordes of German gamers are once again salivating like hungry dogs, counting the hours until they recommence trading spices and building sheds. Perhaps seeking to broaden the game's appeal beyond their native land, the developers have also introduced more globally acceptable activities to the game, namely barbaric acts of sickening violence against fellow man.

A GREAT BIG MELTING POT

According to Sunflowers' international marketing manager Wolfgang Duhr, "We had moderate success in the European and the US market with *1602*, but what we

The Native Americans sleep off their hangovers.

found is that European and American players put more emphasis on the combat part. That's why we've focused more on this in *Anno 1503*, but we're still using all the elements of *1602* because they were successful and players all over the world really liked it. The cool thing about it is you can decide how to play it; you can play the peaceful way or you can play it in a military way."

As a European colonial explorer, you'll come up against nine different cultures, each with individual merits. As Wolfgang says: "For example, the Eskimos are very good at fishing, therefore you can get food very cheaply from them. The Mongolians are a more aggressive culture so they rely on war, but you can forge an alliance with them. The Oriental cultures are very good at introducing spices, and the native Americans, well if you come along

with some alcohol for example, they'll be very happy and try to trade with you."

OVER LAND AND SEA

Dubious racial stereotyping aside, *Anno 1503* looks like being a very detailed affair, with the action taking place over six different climates. Research trees will enable you to upgrade military units, with combat taking place both on land and at sea. Various scenarios will be available, along with a story-driven campaign, an open-ended option and multiplayer shenanigans for up to six players.

By the time you read this, the Germans will have got their hands on the new *Anno*, while an English language version is a few months away. From what we've seen so far, it looks like the type of game you will either dismiss immediately or play until your eyes bleed. If nothing else, it'll keep the Germans off the streets. **PCZ**

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INTERACTIVE

Beware the enchanted blancmanges.

In a clear homage to Lara Croft, Dirk has a backpack.

No small change required.

Calling all Dirk-heads

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

Time to get misty-eyed as *Mark Hill* revisits the '80s

THE DETAILS
DEVELOPER Dragonstone Software
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
WEBSITE www.dragonslair3d.com
OUT November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
- Based on the much-loved coin-op of the early '80s.
- Actual real-time gameplay this time
- Cel-shaded retro-look adds to the charm
- Retains the original's sense of humour

MOST OLD-timers (*I prefer the term 'veteran' – Ed*) caught in a wave of gaming nostalgia like to reminisce about those undisputed classics of the golden era – the likes of *Space Invaders*, *Star Wars Arcade*, *Chuckie Egg* – all boasting awful graphics but gloriously pure gameplay. However, there was one title nearly two decades ago that completely reversed this formula. Based on cutting edge laserdisc technology, 1983's *Dragon's Lair* arcade game looked like a full-blown Disney animated movie, while its gameplay consisted almost entirely of pressing the right button at the right time (see also this month's Emulation Zone – page 22). In a way, the millions

who chucked their change into the slot for hours on end were little more than lab pigeons getting to see the next bit of the cartoon as reward for pecking the correct colour.

UP UP LEFT
While these days the art of game design is all about finding the balance between storytelling and giving the player freedom, back in 1983 a game with a movie-like plot was a real bombshell. Don Bluth, who has gone on to direct such animated rubbish as *Titan AE* and *Thumbelina*, is largely responsible for the great creation that is Dirk the Daring, a charming idiot of a knight, hellbent on rescuing the equally dippy princess Daphne. And while *Dragon's Lair* consisted mostly of avoiding obstacles, the characters and amazing visuals made everyone feel they were starring in their own epic cartoon. There was even a short-lived animated series that showed events as if you were playing the game – Dirk would die horribly, with comments such as: "If Dirk had jumped on the crocodile's head, this would have happened", before you were shown the route he actually did take.

Now, after a long history of Amiga versions and minor console outings, the pseudo-interactive hand-drawn animations of *Dragon's Lair* are being

recreated as proper 3D environments, for a new outing called *Dragon's Lair 3D*. The question is, will this next generation provide those incredible graphics with the real-time gameplay to go with it?

expect any great depth of gameplay. However, what you do get is charm by the bagful, as you explore the castle, battle creatures with your sword, test your reflexes against obstacles, solve

"The pseudo-interactive hand-drawn animations are being recreated as proper 3D environments"

Well, having spent some time with a beta build of the game this month, we can report that the answer is... not exactly.

DIRK CROFT
Dragon's Lair 3D falls rather neatly into the category of an action-platform game, a sort of simplified *Tomb Raider* that will be hoping to attract a younger audience rather than veterans with fond memories for the original. The PC version is identical to the console releases, so don't
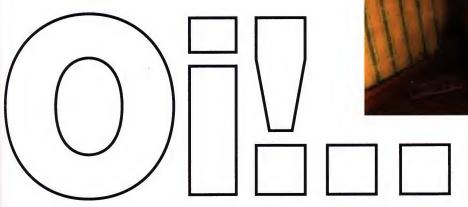
simple puzzles and bask in the retro cel-shaded graphics. There are even some spells – called dragon essences – which show how far the gameplay has departed from the memory-based skills of the original.

In keeping with the spirit of the original (in which the creators of the game did the voices themselves to save money), the acting is pretty dismal. In fact you may be driven to find Daphne in order to strangle her high-pitched larynx rather than save her. But then your little brother will probably love it. And hey, you might too. **PCZ**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Revolution
PUBLISHER TBC
WEBSITE www.revolution.co.uk
OUT Christmas 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The long-awaited conclusion to the hugely successful *Broken Sword* trilogy
- Aims to revolutionise the traditional adventure genre
- No more pointing and clicking!
- Stunning 3D environments and fully redesigned characters
- Carefully adds action elements such as stealth and a variety of random and scripted hazards

PROFILE

CHARLES CECIL

DEVELOPER Revolution
POSITION Managing director
WHAT GAMES HAVE YOU WORKED ON RECENTLY?
Apart from *Broken Sword: TSD*, I was most recently involved with *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire: 2nd Edition*.
FAVOURITE GAME?
Grand Theft Auto III. The closest thing to what an 'interactive movie' should have been all along.
FIRST GAME YOU REALLY PLAYED TO DEATH?
As an impoverished student, I did spend a lot of money on *Galaxians* and *Phoenix*. However the game that left the children temporarily orphaned and nearly ruined my marriage was *Warcraft II*.

CV

REVOLUTION

This York-based development studio was founded by Charles Cecil and Tony Warriner in 1990 and currently employs 21 people. Revolution set out to make strong narrative-driven titles that would appeal to both hardcore and mass-market gamers, and was at one time the biggest developer of adventure games in Europe.

1992 *Lure Of The Temptress*: Revolution's first game was a tongue-in-cheek point-and-click adventure set in a medieval kingdom.

1994 *Beneath A Steel Sky*: A post-apocalyptic sci-fi point-and-clicker, with graphic design by comic artist Dave Gibbons, creator of *The Watchmen*.

1996 *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars*: The first *Broken Sword* adventure saw heroes George Stobbart and Nico Collard taking on the mysterious cult of the Templars. Although slightly overshadowed by the success of various LucasArts titles, the game's lush cartoon visuals and strong story made for a classic of adventure gaming.

1997 *Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror*: The follow-up to *The Shadow Of The Templars* sent George and Nico on a quest involving mysterious pyramids and evil drug barons. Another hit for Revolution.

"We're not writing point-and-click adventures anymore"

Oi!....

CECIL, what's your game?

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

Broken Sword is back, ready to silence its critics and turn the adventure genre on its head. *Jamie Sefton* joins the conspiracy

IF YOU'RE GOING to create adventure games that draw inspiration from thousands of years of human history, and feature extraordinary legends and mythical conspiracies, the ancient city of York could well be the perfect location. Revolution Software has made this Viking and Roman settlement its base of operations for the past decade, producing a stream of popular titles such as *Lure Of The Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*. However, the company is most famous for the *Broken Sword* games, the classic point-and-click adventures starring the slightly gormless George Stobbart and his unreasonably sexy companion, photo-journalist Nico Collard.

We recently made the trip to York to meet Charles Cecil, genteel co-founder and MD of Revolution, for an exclusive work-in-progress peek at the long-awaited conclusion to the trilogy, *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*. Starring a newly made-over George and Nico and now in full 3D, the new adventure expands on dark themes touched upon in previous instalments, taking players on a global tour of locations such as Paris, Prague, South America and Glastonbury.

To find out how Charles plans to re-invent the adventure genre, read on...

PCZ You caused a bit of a storm at a press conference recently when you declared: "The point-and-click adventure is dead. Long live the adventure!" What exactly did you mean by that?
CHARLES Basically, we're not writing point-and-click adventures any more. Our replacement for it is an adventure with action elements. It's *not* an action-adventure like, say, *Tomb Raider – The Sleeping Dragon* is still primarily cerebral in its gameplay. Our way to achieve this is that as you walk towards an object, the icon map on the bottom right-hand corner gives you your various elements – such as 'Examine' – that translate to buttons on a joypad or keyboard. We've always despised adventure gameplay that involves using every object with every background object until you find the solution. We really wanted to get away from that and feel that what we're doing now is what other people will follow and that we're overtaking the people we used to admire.

PCZ But what's so wrong with point-and-click mouse control?

Animations have cartoon-style expressions.

CHARLES It's just extremely restrictive. Also, if you break it down in terms of what you can achieve in games design, there's not very much. I find it incredibly liberating in designing and writing *BS:TSD* with our team, because by moving to direct control and a multiple action button, suddenly the whole thing explodes. It still feels like an adventure, but instead of having to randomly 'try this object on this' because you're stuck, we can open up gameplay that simply wasn't possible before.

PCZ Right, so how will PC gamers who haven't got joypads control the on-screen characters?
CHARLES We worked very hard to find a way we could creatively put the mouse and keyboard together, but ultimately we decided to have keyboard control only. We plan to offer two control methods – one is the *Resident Evil*-style rotate left and right and move forward, and the other using the cursor keys to actually control your character in up to eight directions. In initial tests, both worked fine. We're well aware that not many people will have joypads on PC, so we're determined to make it play really well on keyboard.

THE ADVENTURE GAME
PCZ Can you explain how *BS:TSD* differs from other third-person 'action-adventure' titles?
CHARLES *Tomb Raider*, for example, is built exclusively on jumping and shooting. When you succeed at that, there's a little

bit of story and exposition, which then introduces you to the next gameplay section. We're *completely* different from that. The phrase 'interactive movie' has a very dirty name, but the principle, I think, is very sound. An interactive movie drives you down a strong storyline like a film, but instead of being linear, it's an interactive experience. There's no way you could say that *Tomb Raider* is an interactive movie – it's an action game with a story bolted on. The moment you present someone with a weapon, they expect it to be a gun game.

PCZ Can you give us details of the story in *The Sleeping Dragon*?
CHARLES The third *Broken Sword* is set a couple of years after the last adventure *The Smoking Mirror*, when George and Nico have kind of lost touch with one another. George is flying above the Congo Jungle when an extraordinary electrical storm brings the plane down, almost killing him. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Nico has been invited to meet a computer hacker, who lets her into his apartment. She shoots him three times. Of course this isn't really Nico and the pair are soon reunited and amazed to find that the two incidents are connected. *The Sleeping Dragon* re-introduces the mysterious sect the Templars from *BS1* and the Mayan and Egyptian pyramids

Nico takes time out of a hectic adventure to enjoy a leisurely dump.

from *BS2*. As the game progresses, George and Nico are drawn into a huge conspiracy orchestrated by a megalomaniac called Susarro. This devious man wishes to awaken a horrific power – The Sleeping Dragon – that brought about the near-extinction of man 10,000 years ago. Part of the story relates to the Voynich medieval manuscript, a real book now kept at Yale University. Even though the tome was discovered hundreds of years ago, it is written in a

Action events will require players to solve puzzles within a time limit, adding much tension and excitement.

strange language that even the world's greatest scholars can't translate. Sinister things are written and drawn in it, such as several human figures huddled in underground pits. It's wonderfully creepy and is a major piece of the jigsaw in *The Sleeping Dragon*.

PCZ How have George and Nico changed since *The Smoking Mirror*?
CHARLES We all agreed that Nico was the more exciting character, and as a result we felt we ought to toughen George up a little bit. Not turn him into Indiana Jones or anything, but we wanted him to be a little more cynical and witty, a little bit drier. Graphically we've reflected that – he's matured and is slightly more up to date. Nico's hairstyle had really gone out of fashion, so she's been to the hairdresser, but she's changed less than George. We're aiming again for a serious story, but this time with more humour and banter between the two main characters. Their relationship is really interesting.

THE MOTHER OF RE-INVENTION
PCZ Can you explain the kind of gameplay we can expect in *TSD*?
CHARLES Sure. This is an adventure and one of the primary gameplay elements is

detective work and getting to the bottom of the conspiracy. So, for example, in Paris, Nico heads to the hacker's apartment and hears three gunshots. She breaks into the location and finds a corpse near an answering machine. You can now use the telephone to talk to other people in the game or simply listen to it – maybe there's a clue. Because the control

use her flirtatious nature to distract the guard while you slip by.

PCZ In the other two *Broken Sword* adventures, you can die, which is very shocking and different from, say, the *Monkey Island* games. Will that still be a possibility in *The Sleeping Dragon* – killing the player off?

"We're aiming again for a serious story, but with more humour and banter between the characters"

system is so simple and intuitive, you're concentrating on the game rather than having to fight the controls. The icon map in the bottom right-hand corner is always giving feedback as to what you can do in that situation in conjunction with the inventory.

However, as well as detective work, exploration plays a major role, with the ability to climb around giving the game a much more dynamic feel. In Prague, there's a castle you have to gain access to. George can ring on the bell, but the guard just comes and tells him to go away. However, if you use Nico, she can

CHARLES We really want to avoid killing the player, because it's really not a lot of fun. We want to give the player plenty of warning, but we'll kill you if you're not careful. For example, at the Czech castle, there's a dog barking and a voice-over will warn you. Go a little closer and the animal will start barking some more. A little closer and he'll really start barking, and if you go nearer still he'll attack you. If the dog catches you you're in trouble. But you can always run to a wall and haul yourself up out the way, leaving the unfortunate mutt barking below – which can be another useful way of distracting a guard.

George won't be in his jungle clothes in the final game.

Check out the icon map in the right-hand corner.

It's not the real Paris, but it's pretty close.

PCZ What about cut-scenes – will you have them, or do you plan to let the story unfold through gameplay?
CHARLES Through gameplay, very much so. That's something that we feel we do well. Frankly, if you read books on film scriptwriting, the number one rule is: do not have exposition for exposition's sake – always hide it. The extraordinary thing about the videogames industry is that people don't even bother reading these books! They just say: 'Right we've reached the end of a gameplay section, now we'll have an enormous cut-scene.' It's just very poor. What we work very hard to do is offer as much exposition through the gameplay as possible, so the advances through the story are a reward rather than an obstruction. Many people hate cut-scenes, but nobody resents talking to somebody for 30 seconds and getting a bit of story in context. That's how we'll convey it.

ATMOS-FEAR

PCZ With a year of development to go, the game is already looking graphically impressive…
CHARLES Well, we're particularly proud of the lighting at this stage. A key element

"Many people hate cut-scenes, but nobody resents getting a bit of story in context"

is this idea of creating visual images that are not necessarily realistic, but believable. The lighting is extremely realistic, done in real time, but it's superimposed onto stylised art so that the world the characters inhabit seems believable. We're not doing photorealism – which would be a damn sight easier than doing what we're doing!

PCZ How does the camera work in *BS:TSD*?
CHARLES Because we're not firing projectile weapons, we have much more freedom. We're trying to make the camera as functional and as

cinematic as possible – we just don't have the constraints that we had previously. We actually have a camera movement system that is as close as possible to the one a director has got in place for making a movie. You can put a camera on a rail, and move it around still tracking the player, and it's all driven by where the player is at a certain time. We can keep the camera static and allow the player to move out of shot, or pan across following the player.

The move into full 3D gives George and Nico the ability to clamber around and fully explore the detailed environments.

REVOLUTION'S AWARD-WINNING FACIAL ANIMATION SYSTEM IS ONE OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED EVER SEEN IN A VIDEOGAME

Characters can pout, sneer and use other complex facial expressions.

One particularly impressive aspect of Revolution's set-up is the animation system that's been created to bring the characters' conversations to life. "This is the closest anyone making videogames has got to that distinctive Don Bluth/Disney style of animation," says artistic director Steven Gallagher. Using a skeletal system for the eyebrows and mouth, combined with so-called 'morph targets' on the skin, the team can create a whole range of emotions for their virtual actors. The lip-synching is performed live, saving the animators hours of work. Plus, the ability to have characters who can now walk and talk at the same time means that *The Sleeping Dragon* will have much more dynamic and interesting dialogue scenes.

PCZ Finally, would you say that this is likely to be the last ever *Broken Sword* game?
CHARLES Yes, at the beginning we said it would be a trilogy.

PCZ You're not going to do a George Lucas and keep adding to it?
CHARLES No, there'll never be a prequel. OK, I'm not ruling out a game afterwards, but there are no plans at this stage… **PCZ**

Nico's 21st century make-over.

THE 2003 FREEKICK MODEL
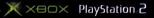
Dead ball doesn't mean dead game. The new set-piece dynamic gives you complete control. You can shoot and dip your effort under the bar, drive it at pace through your own players in the wall or hit it like Roberto C: ridiculous swerve laced with a touch of malice.

THE 2003 FREESTYLE CONTROL MODEL

EA SPORTS™ Freestyle Control is a brand new ball control mode. Freestyle Control gives you individual moves for individual players. The kind of move to embarrass a defender. The kind of move to make him bring you down on the edge of the box. Over to you, Roberto.

THE 2003 PASSING MODEL

New team play and team tactics. Breaking down the opposition needs more precision passing and movement. See Edgar Davids for details.

THE 2003 BALL PHYSICS MODEL

Dodgy headers, wild slices, overhit passes – you can do them all if you're not skilful enough. New ball physics mean the ball won't do all the work for you. The ball will react like the ball that Davids wins, the ball that Giggs flicks and the ball that Roberto Carlos punctures walls with. This should sort out the men from the youth team.
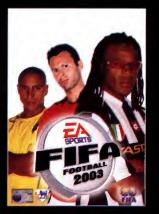
THE 2003 DRIBBLING MODEL

Inverse Kinematics taken to the next level. The ball doesn't stick to you, you have to stick to the ball. Ryan Giggs can do this. Can you do this?

FIFA FOOTBALL 2003

FIFA

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It's in the game

REVIEWS

▲ Christmas is a reviews editor's favourite time of year. If you need any proof why, then cast your eyes to the right and have a squiz at the extensive list of reviews in this month's issue. Pretty good eh? OK, who's the smart arse who just said no?

Kicking things off then, is *James Bond 007: Nightfire*, where you take control of the secret agent who can moisten a woman's knickers faster than an incontinent granny. Mark Hill tackles this one on page 64. Meanwhile, Richie Shoemaker takes some time out from looking after his son to swap being up to his elbows in shit, to being up to his elbows in mud, in the add-on to the world's best shooter, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. Page 70 for that one.

It's all been Greek for Rhianna as she's been tackling Microsoft's epic RTS, *Age Of Mythology* (page 74). Oh yeah and a bit of Norse and Egyptian too. Meanwhile, Steve Hill, hardened by years of late nights playing *Championship Manager*, put all that experience to use to push on till the early hours in an attempt to create the ultimate theme park in *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* (page 80). Sadly for him, he failed. Miserably.

Forced off the fairway by the bad weather, Keith Pullin turned to *Links 2003* (page 95) instead, to help stem the withdrawal symptoms, stopping only to review *Project Nomads* (page 84), the hugely promising action/strategy game from CDV. Meanwhile I've been trying to win the WWE heavyweight championship belt in *WWE RAW* (page 106) with my creation 'The Chicken' who has attained near cult status in the *PC ZONE* office. I'll be posting him online if I find a suitable website. I bet you can't wait to get your hands on that little gem. Really? Noooooooooooooooooooooo.

▼ Have a great Christmas.

Bond is back in this Christmas blockbuster, so put on the suit, polish the Walther and head to page 64 to for our verdict.

PC ZONE CLASSIC

Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.

PC ZONE ESSENTIAL

The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally

you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM

DAVE WOODS

JAMIE SEFTON

What are you currently playing?

UT2003

Medieval: Total War and UT2003

Who's your favourite Bond girl ever? (Rhianna who's your favourite Bond?)

Wai Lin

Pussy Galore

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

64

70

84

MARTIN KORDA

Nightfire, MoH: Spearhead, Age Of Mythology, and *WWE RAW*

The one with the braces from *Moonraker*

ANTHONY HOLDEN

Laser Squad Nemesis and *UT2003*

Kissy Suzuki

RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Age of Mythology and *NOLF2*

Sean Connery

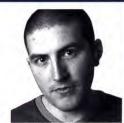**STEVE HILL**

Championship Manager: Season 01/02

None of them are worth buffing the droid for
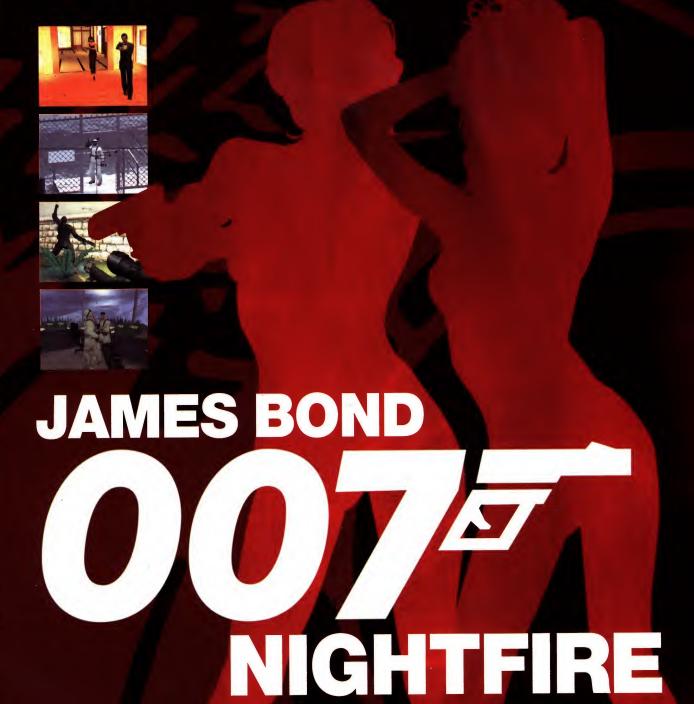
RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault – Spearhead

Shirley Eaton

MARK HILL

NOLF2 and Divine Divinity

Wai Lin and Honey Rider. You always need two.

JAMES BOND
007
NIGHTFIRE

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Gearbox | ETA: November 29 | www.gearboxsoftware.com

REQUIRES PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Fanny magnet 007 goes gun crazy. Woman repellent
Mark Hill **is expected to review**

THESE ARE trying times for Her Majesty's Secret Servant. With *xXx* bringing the secret agent movie into the 21st century and the lovely Cate Archer bringing back the '60s charm in *No One Lives Forever 2*, the old boy is under some pressure to show he's still the coolest action hero around.

Of course, the enduring misogynist has been in a tough spot once or twice before. I'm sure Pierce will wipe the floor with Vin Diesel in the forthcoming *Die Another Day*, and we had every confidence that *Nightfire* would deliver in the gaming contest. After all, it's been developed by Gearbox, the team behind the fantastic *Half-Life* add-on *Opposing Force*, and features lush exotic locations and an array of gadgets. What could possibly go wrong?

SAY CHEESE

Well, if you're a Bond purist, like me, then quite a lot actually. Not that *Nightfire* is a bad game, it's just that it isn't nearly as good as it could have been. And you notice something is slightly awry straight away. Bond films always grab your attention with a spectacular opening full of amazing set pieces and breathtaking stunts but, in a preview of things to come, *Nightfire* kicks off with you infiltrating a castle straight out of *Wolfenstein*, pressing some switches to unlock some doors and shooting some guards. I think I've played that one before.

It tries to make up for this by allowing several routes into the castle (see the Walkthrough

"It's not a bad game, it just isn't nearly as good as it could have been"

Using your x-ray glasses on women can be very revealing.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

Q would be disappointed that his gadgets aren't used more.

GOT AN EXTRA THREE PAGES?

Nightfire is a game of missed opportunities, so it's hard to single out one thing that should have been done. The gadgets are massively underused and the stealth levels don't work particularly well. But the biggest missed opportunity is simply the failure to make you feel like you're in a Bond movie. Despite the music and the Brosnan likeness, it never feels quite right. Ironically, in my *Soldier Of Fortune II* review I said the missed opportunity was having a redneck for a main character when a James Bond would have worked so much better. There's no pleasing me, is there?

Taking sneaky photos of sexy women is all in a day's work for James Bond. Sounds like hell.
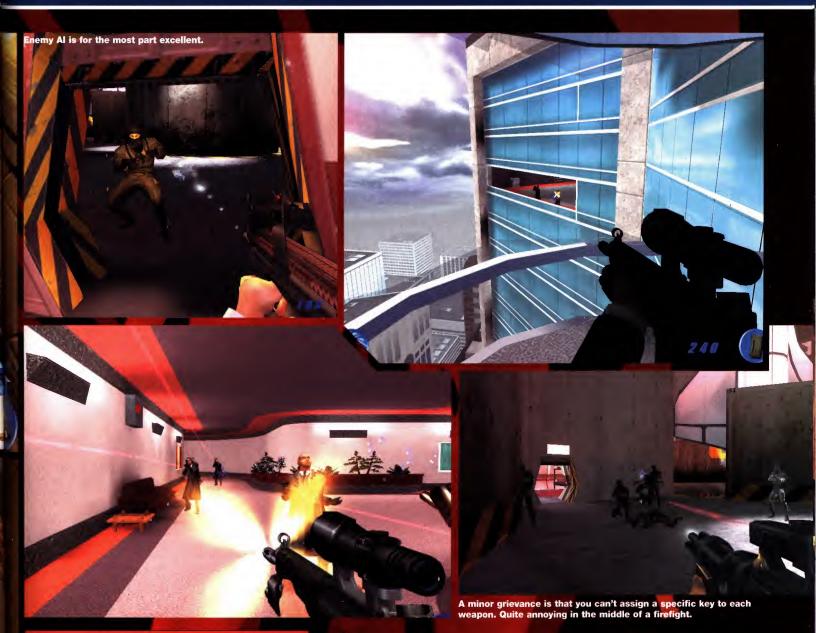
panel to see what they are) thus trying to trick you into thinking this is some open-ended, *Deus Ex*-style open-ended shooter. This taste of freedom, however, is both your first and your last. When you finally get into the castle proper you have to mingle in a high-society party and take some photographs of the women there with your hidden camera. Great, you think, now I'm really going to act out a proper Bond scene.

Only you find the said party consists of a handful of people standing in a room looking at paintings and that, to take a proper picture of the classy women there, you have to stand in front of them like a bloody tourist. What's the point of turning a lighter into a camera if you're going to ask them to say cheese?

To be fair, there are plenty of other gadgets in your inventory, which certainly make you feel

like you're involved in a spy-thriller. But some of them simply go to waste. For example, you'd think that the grapple hook would be great to let you move around big areas, attaching yourself to trees outside or rails and vents inside. Instead, you can only use it on special hooks that glow so you don't miss them and which the evil mastermind has kindly left behind for you (he must have, since they serve

Enemy AI is for the most part excellent.

A minor grievance is that you can't assign a specific key to each weapon. Quite annoying in the middle of a firefight.

BOND ON BOND

YOU CAN ALL BE BOND ONLINE

After the nice surprise that was *NOLF 2*'s co-operative mode, *Nightfire* returns to the same old Capture The Flag and Deathmatch modes we all know and tolerate. It's similar to the multiplayer in *Jedi Knight II* or *Elite Force*, in that you can choose the skins of familiar characters that aren't in the single-player game. So Oddjob, Jaws and Pussy Galore are all there to be shot. One of the maps is set in the Fort Knox seen in *Goldfinger*, although you can't throw your hat about or electrocute your foes. The biggest disappointment though is that you can't look like Sean, Roger, George or Timothy, only Pierce, at least until the modders get to work.

Play as your favourite baddies in the multiplayer games.

no other purpose). And even these hooks are few and far between.

SAVE THE WORLD, OR SOMETHING

However, possibly *Nightfire*'s biggest let-down is its story. Bond films have never been known for their tight, original plots, but the story in *Nightfire* is so flimsy I couldn't even tell you what it is. And I've completed the damn game. There's some guy called Drake – a rather poor goateed villain who disappointingly fails to stroke white cats or keep pools of piranha – and some computer virus called Nightfire. Or is it an evil missile attack plan? Yes, I distinctly remember something about missiles. And an office tower. Oh, and some women in sexy lingerie. Or was that just the website I was looking at? Actually, the lingerie provides the most Bondish moments in gameplay, since all the other

things (such as kissing beautiful women) are saved for the cut-scenes.

How it works is this. You have a pair of sunglasses that can be used to see in the dark or as x-rays to see through walls. Their other use is to see chicks in their underwear, like Brosnan does in *The World is Not Enough*. And, in a classic Sean Connery-era sexist move, it only applies to women. Use the x-ray glasses on men and you'll see their skeleton. Obviously the thinking is that all the heterosexuals who will play the game would find the sight of men's underwear disturbing and offensive, when it could have been used to great comical effect. *NOLF2* certainly would have.

LICENCE TO KILL A LOT

Childish fantasies aside, there's little to differentiate this from any shooter of the last few years. And, as our esteemed editor Dave Woods said in his

NOLF2 review last month, even adored titles like *Medal Of Honor* are starting to bore us with their unending streams of levels crammed with bodies to shoot down. When you've experienced the depth, freedom and originality of *Deus Ex*, it can be quite hard to go back to hacking down corridors like a frenzied automaton.

However, if this is the type of action you like, you'll find that *Nightfire*'s frenetic pace is up there with the best of them. There's certainly more variation and entertainment here than in, say, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, and the more trigger-happy among you will be in your element. You also get the occasional moment of stealth, when getting seen or killing a civilian guard spells the end of the level. However, like so many other shooters (*Soldier Of Fortune II* springs to mind), the sneaking aspect doesn't measure up to the quality of the no-holds-barred action.

The space station level is not up to *Moonraker* standards, but it's still a lot of fun.

The engine is Gearbox's own creation – using technology from both id and Valve – but it doesn't really feel any different from all the recent *Quake III*-powered shooters (which, let's be honest, is hardly a failing). There are some stunning locations, and it looks every bit as good as *Medal Of Honor* and *Soldier Of Fortune II*.

There's a gorgeous Japanese mansion with large gardens, but this is tempered by the following interminable mission set in a dreary office block. Later there's an island level similar to the one Sean Connery sucked Ursula Andress's foot on, which is so beautiful you'll find yourself simply standing around admiring the scenery. It's a bit inconsistent, but overall quite pleasing.

DR MAYBE

The AI is also excellent for the most part, with enemies running away when they're taking a beating and charging towards you when they know they can overpower you. It's also nice to see them hopping when shot in the leg or shaking a hand after it's been stung by a bullet, and even getting hit by the stray bullets of fellow henchmen. The strange thing is that they're nowhere near as challenging or satisfying as the soldiers in *Opposing Force*.

> **"There are some stunning locations, which are every bit as good as those in Medal Of Honor"**

Early in the game the difficulty level is set low by letting you take a stupid amount of bullets before dying. The game can get away with this because your health isn't represented by a number, just an ambiguous circle of decreasing segments, so you never know just how much health each bullet takes away. Needless to say, later in the game these segments disappear rather quickly. Conversely, enemies in the later levels are inhumanly tough, and you often need to empty a magazine into someone's head before they'll hit the floor. It can be annoying at times, but at least it stops you from just rushing into rooms spraying bullets. Instead, you need to peek round corners, taking them out from a covered position and then waiting for the braver elements to come and get you.

Going back to the health – it makes a pleasant change to have no ridiculous kits or potions miraculously healing mortal wounds. The only thing available is armour. It's also worth mentioning that the rocket launcher features a fantastic first-person camera that lets you become the rocket and guide it just like you could with *UT*'s redeemer. Other weapons aren't quite as satisfying when compared to other shooters though.

HE'S GOING IN

Although most of the game is mindless massacring, you do get some variety in the form of spacesuit levels in low gravity and the occasional third-person action, such as climbing up a building or swinging on a cable. The idea is lifted straight out of *Project IGI*, and the level where you infiltrate an airbase has a blueprint which is also pure *IGI*. There are a couple of tense set pieces too, like getting stuck on a skyscraper's outside lift, with rockets and bullets coming at you from all sides. And then the elevator begins to slide down.

WALKTHROUGH →

A FALSE DAWN
The first mission presents you with a number of choices on how to infiltrate a castle. If only the rest of the game allowed you so much freedom...

1 You parachute down just outside the castle with nothing but a silencer pistol. The guards are everywhere. How do you get in?

2 The quickest way is to use stealth to get into the back of this truck unseen, and be driven in. But it's not as easy as it sounds.

3 If that fails you can just shoot your way to the main gate and enter that way. They might be expecting you on the other side though.

4 By far the most satisfying way is swinging across a cable, sneaking past some windows and entering one of the towers.

BONDAGE GEAR

FORGET THE LEATHER UNDERPANTS, TRY THE MOBILE PHONE WHIP INSTEAD

LASER WATCH
Not only does it accurately tell the time, it emits a piercing laser beam. Use it to open padlocks – handy. Seen in *Never Say Never Again*.

STUN KEYRING
For the stealthy missions it's useful to sneak up on guards and give them a nasty shock. You'll know they're out cold because they'll snore. Bless.

PEEPING LIGHTER
Health-conscious James doesn't smoke anymore, but he can use it to take pictures. Sadly though, you only get to do this twice in the whole game.

GRAPPLE MOBILE
No texting Bond girls, I'm afraid, but you can grapple your way to otherwise inaccessible areas, which are lit up for you so you don't miss them.

HACKING PDA
Pretty self-explanatory. It's a PDA. You use it to hack into things. Seen in *The World is Not Enough*. And no, you can't buy one of them at Dixons.

DART PEN
If you can't get close enough to use the keyring, this dartgun pen will also send the little mites to sleep. Also useful for writing cheques and signing autographs.

DISC CREDIT CARD
This disc is used to plant worms in the enemy's computers. Why it has to be hidden in a credit card is beyond me. At least it looks nice and swish.

Occasionally the action switches to third-person which works to break the tempo as well as remind you that you're Pierce Brosnan.

If the action doesn't get you going, the Bond score will.

"A very solid if predictable FPS, and if you're happy with that, you won't be disappointed"

down to Q's lab. One where you get to fire a machine gun while skiing down a mountain backwards and diving among sharks. One where you get to sit in a casino and play cards or roulette. One with freedom and depth. Where you actually felt like James Bond and not some trigger-happy oaf. What you get instead is a very solid if predictable FPS, and if you're happy with that, then you won't be disappointed.

These breaks in the gameplay are all too rare though, and at times, things can get rather repetitive. Sometimes you have to wander round levels cleared of enemies trying to find that door you've failed to notice, or that window you didn't realise you had to smash. There are even some infuriating end-of-level bosses that again make you feel you've seen this all before. Tough helicopters anyone? At least you do get to fight some cool ninjas, who somersault and flashbang their way around you with dazzling speed. But they, like several other good things in *Nightfire*, aren't nearly as plentiful as they could have been.
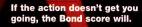
I know what some of you are thinking, so I'll nip it in the bud now. The fact that *Nightfire* is also being released on consoles is no excuse for its simple-mindedness and lack of depth. Both *Half-Life* and *Deus Ex* have been released on console. I rest my case.

CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR
The truth is that *Nightfire* feels slightly under par when compared to what it could have been. If this review has read slightly negatively, it's not because *Nightfire* is a poor game (it wouldn't have scored this well if it was), far from it. The problem is that it doesn't do anything we haven't seen a dozen times before from other shooters this year. Is that too much to ask?

You get the feeling there were some ambitious plans for this, (more gadgets, set pieces and interaction with other characters and more humorous quips) but they had to be shelved in order to get this out in time for Christmas. I have no doubt that if they'd had time, Gearbox would have used their *Half-Life* nous to make the James Bond game I wanted. One where you got to walk into M's office after flirting with Moneypenny and before going

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Stirring music
✔ Solid AI
✔ Some variety
✔ Beautiful graphics and settings
✘ Doesn't always feel Bond enough
✘ Lacks immersion

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An excellent shooter, if not a Golden Buy

MEDAL OF HONOR:
ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Los Angeles | ETA: November 22
www.ea.com/eagames/official/moh_alliedassault
REQUIRES PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

After a resounding victory earlier this year, could the year's most successful action game spawn an expansion pack to die for, asks *Richie Shoemaker*

IT'S BEEN a wonderful year for first-person action fans, one that has seen the standard raised a number of times across a whole raft of areas. It began of course with the release of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, and after three years of waiting, we could finally engage ourselves in a game to match the benchmark standard set by Valve Software's *Half-Life*. Its developer, 2015, has since been hailed as the new Valve and it was only right and proper that before a full sequel was undertaken, a mission pack would arrive to keep our spirits up during the long wait and perhaps raise the standard still further. If *Medal Of Honor* was the

new *Half-Life*, it must surely follow that *Spearhead* would be its *Opposing Force*?

As with *Half-Life*'s exquisite add-on, *Spearhead* introduces a new set of missions woven around those of the original game. Instead of taking part in the D-Day beach landings, you begin the game just hours before, as part of an Airborne Ranger mission set to parachute behind enemy lines and hinder the German supply routes, making sure that when the hour approaches and the invasion begins, Nazi reserves are unable to respond. Of course since your other alter ego is waiting in the middle of the English Channel to wade ashore,

INPERSPECTIVE

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
Reveiwed Issue 112, Score 88%
Return To Castle Wolfenstein is also based on a World War II theme, but it lacks the sheer excitement and atmosphere of *Medal Of Honor*. *RTCW* is still well worth a look though, especially for its excellent multiplayer options.

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE
Reveiwed Issue 85, Score 85%
Though the mothership game has relinquished its crown, *Opposing Force* still ranks alongside *Mysteries Of The Sith* as one of the best expansions ever made for a game. It's obvious the makers of *Spearhead* took a long hard look before starting work, but they obviously didn't look hard enough.

NPCS: Allies 13(13) Axis 0(32)

"I don't want to jump, I don't want to jump."

NPCS: Allies 3(3) Axis 4(4)

Health 38

PzB41 Anti-Tank 14

That'll teach him.

Spearhead brings in a new member to the *Medal Of Honor* cast, Sergeant Jack Barnes, voiced by photo-fit Hollywood villain, Gary Oldman.

FROM FRONT TO FRONT

The action then moves on to Belgium, where across the Ardennes Forest, US forces are taking a winter break before the final push into Germany. Little do they know the Nazis have planned a desperate counter-attack, spearheaded by their new Jadgtiger tanks and modified Panthers.

After the initial mission has been completed, our hero is then posted east to join the Russian forces as they encircle the shattered ruins of the Nazi capital, which Hitler has decreed must be defended to the last

BATTLEFIELD 1945

A NEW MODE FOR YOUR MODEM

To complement *Medal Of Honor*'s already impressive spread of multiplayer options, *Spearhead* includes a new game type, as well a few new maps for the existing games. Tug Of War is its name and it's based on the Domination/Assault style of play where each side must capture a number of points to win the map, of which there are five. One twist on the action is that your spawn points and that of your enemy can be destroyed, which sets up some quite impressive firefights. As usual, as soon as the servers go up we'll tell you how it plays online, hopefully next issue.

It's not *Battlefield 1942*, but it's not bad.

drop of blood. Here, among the rubble and up against the last remaining tanks and troops, you are sent to take part in the final battle outside the Reichstag building itself, where the Russians will raise the Communist banner to signal Germany's final defeat

CUT AND PASTE

They do indeed sound like a promising set of missions, don't they? And even though they bare many similiarites to those of the original game, they feature a host of new characters and weapons as well as two new Allies to play alongside – the

British and Russians. The problem is although there are plenty of new things to look at *Spearhead* is very predictable. For example, in the first mission you soon come across a machine-gun nest and you immediately remember that in *Allied Assault* as soon as you killed the gunner and reached the sandbags, a group of Germans would appear in the direction you'd just come from. Right on cue they do. The trick had worn thin already and I had only been playing for five minutes.

The pillaging of *Allied Assault*'s ideas doesn't end there and it isn't long before

MISSED OPPORTUNITY ◉

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER

Remember having to find a German uniform and identification papers in the original game in order to get past a guard? You must remember finding Germans hiding in wardrobes? Then there were those scripted moments where you would look behind you and see one of your men looking like he'd filled his trousers. It was moments like those that made *Allied Assault* such a memorable game. There's very little of that sort of thing here, which would have helped to break up the pace.

Health

The Battle Of The Bulge. Where are the tanks then?

Health 100

The best weapon in the game, because it's British.

"Expect to be captivated by the stunning backdrops and magnificent AI"

Who said the British were never willing to help an American in trouble?

The levels are huge, detailed and, more often than not, breathtakingly beautiful.

you start to wonder which rehashed mission from *Allied Assault* you'll be tackling next, instead of looking forward to something completely new.

It seems to be the case that *Spearhead*'s level designers simply took all the missions from the original game, cut them up into little pieces and glued them back together in a different order. Every step of the way there is a sense of *déjà vu*, and although *Opposing Force* was similar, at least there you recognised certain areas and events momentarily – you didn't have to play through them all over again. Of course saying that, replicating the sublime atmosphere and superb ideas of the world's best shooter isn't necessarily a tragedy, and if you loved *Allied Assault*, then this will go a considerable way to giving you a thrilling WWII FPS hit.

SMOKING GUN

A major factor driving you forward through the game is wondering what new weapons you'll get to mow the enemy down with. It isn't long until you get to find out either, as you meet up with some British

paratroopers who are more than willing to relieve you of your cache of stolen weapons and replace them with some good old British ones (as are the Russians when you join them later on).

Though there are no spectacularly outstanding weapons, there are plenty of them, and they are varied enough to all warrant use in certain situations, meaning you're not constantly relying on the same one or two guns

throughout. The choice includes a British revolver, rifle, sub-machine gun and grenades, ditto for the Russians, plus a new Sniper rifle and smoke grenades. However, it would have been great to have seen some new and exciting military hardware, like mines you could plant, perhaps a length of cheese wire to garrotte

THE SCENIC ROUTE

KEEP THE RED FLAG FLYING

In reality of course, it was Communist Russia that dealt the final blow to Nazi Germany, but since *Medal Of Honor* is the official game of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, there wasn't much chance of an add-on pack where you play a Russian soldier on the march from Stalingrad to Berlin. Instead your character is magically transported from the Western to the Eastern front, for no other reason than to give you a change of scenery. Still, at least the scenery is great to look at. Historically speaking, Spearhead's final chapter is a joke – as if Stalin would let a capitalist GI take all the credit for winning the war. Pah!

"American army soldier wins war and captures Berlin singlehandedly. Yeah, as if."

"You big wuss, I only shot the stairs."

Mounted guns can be used to take down planes.

Burn, baby, buuuuuuurn!

"The voice-acting is spot on, with the dry British sense of humour and stiff upper lip perfectly captured in the script"

passing guards, maybe even a flamethrower or flare gun (and with Russians about, it's surprising there are no recycled vodka bottles filled with petrol to throw around). To their credit, the developers have included some extra mounted weapons; mortars and anti-aircraft guns, which can be used to blunt an enemy advance or take out the odd tank, and the tension often raises to fever-pitched proportions as you try and fend off seemingly endless waves of enemy hordes.

NOT BAD COMPANY
The voice-acting is spot on, especially the British voices which are of a typically high quality, with the dry British sense of humour and stiff upper lip perfectly captured in the script.

The AI is again exceptional, furthering the high standard set by *Allied Assault* by making the enemy even more wily and unpredictable than before. German soldiers pop up from behind walls to fire shots, taking cover behind trees and holding back in doorways. They dart into cover, and best of all, run away if overwhelmed. They even lie down, which I think is a sneaky German trick they've learnt since the first game.

Interface-wise, the ability to lean around corners in the single-player game has also been incorporated from the multiplayer game, and since you'll be hunkering behind trees, is a very welcome feature,

and adds an extra tactical dimension missing from so many shooters.
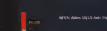
PIN-UP GIRL
But perhaps *Spearhead*'s most exciting feature are the graphics. Despite still using the *Quake III: Arena* engine, id's ageing code still manages to impress. The sheer size of some of the levels is incredible, with entire villages mapped out within surrounding forests. The landscape undulates far more realistically than before, and the days when we had to roam across flat featureless plains bordered by conical mountains are, it seems, over.

Whether or not you buy *Spearhead* will come down to

what it is you want from an add-on pack. Cynics will say that it's simply more missions and extra weapons, but rather than this being hugely disappointing, there's more than enough here to thrill you and replicate the sheer adrenal rush so masterfully created by *Allied Assault*. Despite the somewhat rehashed missions, the new environments and weapons provide ample incentive to keep marching

through. Don't expect to be surprised, but do expect to be captivated by the stunning backdrops and magnificent AI.

THE FINAL PUSH
The sad thing is that had the developers had the time (it's probably no coincidence this has arrived for Christmas) or the inclination to spend time searching for more creative and original ideas, *Spearhead* could have been the best add-on of all time. As it is, it's still an essential addition to *Medal Of Honor*, if nowhere near to a Classic. So lock and load soldier, there's a war to be won, and believe me, you're in for one hell of a ride along the way. **PCZ**

This is no time to be opening a can of tuna solider. There's a war to be won.

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Superb graphics and backdrops
✔ A ton of new weapons
✔ New multiplayer mode
✔ Stunning AI
✘ Somewhat predictable
✘ Many missions are very similar to the original game

82

A highly honourable campaign

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

■ | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Ensemble Studios | Price: £29.99 | ETA: November 8 | **www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology**

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800. 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Age Of Mythology **drops from the sky.** *Rhianna Pratchett* **gives thanks to the gods**

"My kingdom for a Norse."

The Ray Harryhausen tribute game.

WELCOME to Ancient Greece. A time of legends – when you couldn't move for would-be heroes traipsing off to gain riches and glory by slaughtering some poor deformed creature who'd just happened to steal a few sheep. And what about the gods? Bastards the lot of them. Bored of the endless toga parties and fighting among themselves, they meddled in the affairs of men, until those mortals raised their fists to the heavens and defied them – whereupon they gleefully descended upon the earth bringing with them torture methods involving endlessly shifting boulders up a hill or having some of the squashier parts of ones anatomy repeatedly plucked out by the local wildlife.

In fact the Greek gods aren't the only ones getting the *Age Of* treatment, as the game also revolves around two other eras of gods and mortals, the Norse and the Egyptians. And what better mythical times for the setting of *Age Of Mythology*, the latest title from Microsoft's world famous, award-winning RTS series and its first 3D strategy outing?

SINGLE-MINDED

I have to admit in *Age Of Empires II: The Age of Kings*, I only took a passing interest in the single-player campaign. It was solid but standard fare, and multiplayer proved to be much more of an interesting training ground. But in *AoM* things are very different. For a start there's much more of an absorbing storyline to the massive 36-mission campaign (divided up into the three eras), akin to the quality storyline in *Warcraft III*. This was frankly the last thing I expected to see in a Microsoft

It's not the most comfortable view to play in, but you can't help but zoom in for a close-up.

RTS. Gameplay they do well, but a quality storyline always seemed something that was previously left on the cutting room floor.

In fairness, they have far better story-based material to work with this time around, considering that Greek, Norse and Egyptian mythology is full of rich and enthralling tales. In Microsoft's interpretation, the single-player campaign starts with the Greeks being called upon to face down a number of threats to their lands. Initially the danger comes from local pirates, but later you get to participate in the Trojan Wars and end up in pursuit of a mysterious maniacal Cyclops.

After the main Greek heroes pursue the Cyclops into Hades and subsequently get stranded, they traverse the underworld and end up emerging in Egypt, and this seamlessly leads on to the second part of the campaign, and subsequently onto the last Norse section. While there isn't exactly character 'development' going on, there are key players throughout the story whose adventures you follow, and there are times when you could almost fool yourself into thinking you were playing an RPG.

OLD AND NEW
Much of the underlying gameplay of AoM will be familiar to fans of the series, as a lot of the basic structure is taken from the previous two games. Food is still gathered from berry bushes, farms, wild animals and fish. Wood is chopped from surrounding forests, gold is dug up from mines and stone is no longer part of the economic equation. The main economic buildings are still town centres, archery, stables, barracks and blacksmiths – the usual stuff.

But Ensemble Studios has made a conscious effort to make AoM's gameplay much more distinguishable from previous titles (they've even included a map editor) and for the most part it achieves it in a way that Warcraft III didn't fully pull off. There may only be three main sides, but much more effort has been put into making those sides as diverse as possible, both through giving the civilisations their own unique hero units, and by making the way each side plays and evolves, different.

The Greeks are the easiest to get to grips with, because they play more like the original sides in Age of Kings, and require a balance of all resources to produce buildings and units, and adopt a similar style of gathering and upgrading. The Egyptians

"Much of the underlying gameplay will be familiar to fans of the series"

The building of the Trojan horse is one of the more familiar plotlines.

Restoration power: you can do anything when you're a god.

Farms are a perpetual source of food.

Stop banging your monitor – it's an eclipse you fool.

The Meteor Storm power is a real show-stopper.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The gods' screens are one of the less appealing sights.

YOU CAN'T GO FAR WRONG WHEN YOU'RE GOD

Ensemble Studios have covered their bases, which is why there's no obvious overriding flaw in *Age Of Mythology*. The gameplay is fantastic, the graphics when in full flow look great, the multiplayer is strong and there's even a scenario editor.

The only flaws come from little niggles such as the god screens, which are strangely ugly and look like they've come from a completely different game. The basic gameplay still adheres to the *Age Of* tradition, which runs the risk of players not giving it the time it deserves because it feels like *AoE2* with bells on. To the dedicated gamer however, it's an intensely rewarding experience all round.

take a bit more time to learn, as they don't need wood for their basic structures, so things like houses, markets and drop sites are free. However they are slower to construct buildings than the other sides, although faster at creating units.

The Norse are probably the most unique side of the three. Their gatherers do just that – gather food. Dwarves can do the same as gatherers, only slower, but they're very fast at collecting gold. Building structures is left to the military units, which means the Norse will make an awesome rushing side.

YE GODS!

Rather than opting for multiple civilisations with predetermined strengths and weaknesses, the way a side develops is now reliant on your personal choices to a certain extent.

This is mainly achieved by the introduction of gods and worship. The three main civilisations are divided into three sub-groups, rather like factions. For example, when you play as the Norse you get a choice of your major god of worship, Odin, Thor or Loki. While the Norse as a whole share basic units and buildings, each god comes with

their own benefits and powers. So this in effect means there are nine possible civilisations in the game, although they're not as easily defined as those in *Age Of Kings*. But it doesn't stop there. As you advance through the ages you get a choice of several minor gods to worship, which each bring their own advantages. The Norse have nine minor gods in all and with two being unlocked at a time as you advance through each age, although which two you get to choose from will depend on which major god you start with.

It sounds complicated and it is at first, because it's much more of an innovative way of developing your civilisation than before. One of the problems with *Age Of Kings*, particularly in multiplayer, was that the seasoned player would see what civilisation their opponent was playing and automatically know what units and strengths they had to defend against. In *AoM* you're never entirely sure just what you're going to face, which makes multiplayer that much more interesting, and we'll be testing that out fully next month in our online review.

Ensemble Studios has obviously had a lot of fun developing the godly powers

The cut-scenes are much more detailed than in *Warcraft III*.

Gargarensis

This is interesting, I would have thought you smarter than to ignore my warning. Fortunately, there are other routes to Tartarus, so this one can be closed.

"He reckons he's god's gift, he does."

MYTHING LINK

CALL ON THE GODS TO BLESS YOU WITH STORYBOOK CREATURES TO FIGHT BY YOUR SIDE

Mythical units provide some of the game's strongest and most entertaining features. You gain the ability to build them by accumulating favour points through worshipping the gods. Each side has a different way of doing this; Greeks send their villagers to worship in a temple, Egyptians build monuments to the gods and the Norse gain favour by engaging in hunting and battle. Myth units are very strong and can only really be effectively faced down by heroes. The type of mythical units you create depend on the god you choose to worship, but some of the more interesting include Hydras, which grow more heads the longer they fight and Medusas which turn other units to stone. Combine this with mythical units like the Colossus, Cyclops, giant lions and Minotaurs and battlefields start to look like an explosion in a Ray Harryhausen workshop.

"Five heads are better than one."

of each deity. The gods you use as your major and minor objects of worship will determine the unique mythical units your side can create, bestow innate benefits to your side such as faster building or cheaper units, and also give you powerful spells that can be activated once in a game. These powers can do widespread damage to units and buildings such as the Meteor Storm power, help benefit your units in battle by channelling them with health or armour, as well as aiding things like speedier farming or faster mining.

A NEW AGE

What *AoM* does have by the bucketload is an unparalleled sense of atmosphere for an RTS game. This is not so much down to the graphics, which while still head and shoulders above *Empire Earth*, pale in comparison to *Warrior Kings* and only really come into their own when there's loads happening on screen. In the wilderness around your camp, deer, bear and rhinos roam; above birds and bats circle the air, while sharks prowl the surrounding waters and seaweed waves in the shallows.

And the detail isn't just confined to the landscape. Your troops look their best when in the midst of a good battle, and the new 3D engine that Microsoft is so proud of really starting to pay off. Egyptian Sphinxes rear up onto their hind legs, savagely mauling any unfortunate units that come near them with their front claws, Minotaurs and Cyclops toss their enemies through the air, breaking the trees all around them – it's an impressive sight.

Age Of Mythology contains everything you would expect from an award-winning design team with such an impressive pedigree. I went in expecting good all-round and accessible gameplay, and I got that. But what I didn't expect, was to be surprised by so many features, and as many a jaded reviewer will tell you, surprise is an all too rare quality to find. The storyline is great, the gaming longevity is endless and there's an impressive level of detail throughout, from the environments, to the movements of the individual units.

While the visuals in *Age Of Mythology* might not be up to today's standard, with games like *Warrior Kings* and *Medieval* shining brightly, the gameplay and especially the depth of detail is every bit as entertaining and challenging. Ensemble might not be the kings of RTS anymore, but the genre they helped to pioneer is all the better for *Mythology* and hopefully you'll be able to see past the screenshots to the beauty within. **PCZ**

"Has an unparalleled sense of atmosphere for an RTS"

The sea battles are similar to *Age Of Kings*.

The Lure power is a stone which coaxes wild animals near your cage.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Great storyline
✔ Varied mission structure
✔ Innovative civilisation development
✔ Very detailed
✗ Not as graphically accomplished as other RTS titles
✗ Same basic structure as previous *Age Of* games

90

The boys are back in town

Romulan swine, your shield is low und I haff three veapons ready to fire.

Ships can now be customised and their weapons and equipment upgraded.

STAR TREK: STARFLEET COMMAND III

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Taldren | ETA: November 15 |
www.starfleetcommand3.com

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** 128 Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

There's still life in the old *Star Trek* series as Captain *Andrew Wright* boldly discovers

LIKE A BORG cube tumbling inexorably through space, the *Star Trek* media machine keeps boldly rolling on, assimilating many previously staunch detractors in its path. *Star Trek* games now encompass practically every genre, but with its hardcore simulation aspects, the *Starfleet Command* serious is one for the older school of *Trek* fans. Developed by the same Taldren team responsible for the first two incarnations, *SFC3* is the first to be set in The Next Generation (TNG) era.

The 3D look-and-feel has been completely revamped to disguise the fact that this is very much a two-dimensional space battle simulation, which is heavily influenced by the old Star Fleet Battles (SFB) boardgame. You take on the role of captain – imagine yourself as Kirk or Picard if you like – and tackle various missions from defending a convoy to running down pirate intruders or blasting it out head to head with a Romulan battlecruiser.

Despite looking almost identical to *SFC2*, an awful lot has changed. The interface has been simplified and streamlined, as has the gameplay. For example, there are now just four shields to a craft rather than six, the power priorities panel dispenses with micromanaging things like life support systems and several controversial items like missiles have been forgotten.

FUDGE THAT
Fortunately, the original SFB rules have also been improved. For instance, a weapon that did four points of damage from two to six hexes (the units by which distance is measured), dropping off to two points between seven and 12, will now have a smooth transition throughout its entire range calculated on-the-fly. Oh, and point-blank is now anything inside three hexes.

SFC3 ships are now fully configurable but based on sensible rules about mass, number of hardpoints and Warp Core size, so to some extent you can design your own. Multi-skilled officers can be traded and improved with experience, allowing you to carry out better manoeuvres, while things such as high-stress turns, maximum speed and cloaking now depend more on your ships' and officers' abilities rather than on pure luck.
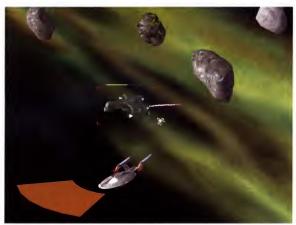
BORG IS BEAUTIFUL
You can play as one of four races, namely the Federation, Klingons, Romulans and, wait for it… the Borg. Yes, it's true, you finally get to pilot your own Borg cube around space. And the first three races have their own multimission single-player campaigns and almost 50 individual scenarios.

Cardassians, Ferenghi and pirates will figure in the

"Yes, it's true, you finally get to pilot your own Borg cube around space"

An asteroid field? Right, I'm out of here.

Dynaverse system, and the server-based Star Trek universe is full of missions and plotlines into which sad old starship commanders can immerse themselves. I say that because at the time of writing this, it's not ready yet, but look out for an online review of this next issue.

SFC3 is probably the *Star Trek* technophile's ultimate space battle game. It's all about firing arcs, shield strengths, power priorities and piloting skills, but fortunately, micromanagement is kept to a minimum. It's fast, furious and more fun than it has any real right to be. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Lovely graphics
✔ Configurable ships
✔ Neat and well-designed interface
✗ Overly hardcore for many

80

Best in the series, if a little limited

Note the strategic positioning of the camera near the water splash.

Would you visit a theme park on a volcanic island?

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Chris Sawyer | ETA: Out Now | www.rollercoastertycoon.com

REQUIRES PII 300, 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 733, 256Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Steve Hill gets in a twist with this alleged sequel

IN RECENT years, so-called 'tycoon' games have become something of a byword for mediocrity, with the genre extrapolated to cover the most unlikely of subject matters. We've been bombarded with the likes of *Zoo Tycoon*, *Moon Tycoon*, *Hotel Giant*, *Beach Life*, not to mention the little-known classic, *Chip Shop Manager*. Derivative nonsense in the main, but one title stands out from the dross, namely the original *RollerCoaster Tycoon*. Despite being little more than a thinly-veiled homage to *Theme Park* – arguably the game that started it all – Chris Sawyer's quirky big dipper 'em up proved a

worldwide hit with five million copies being sold.

Following a couple of largely unnecessary add-ons, this is – as all but the most simple-minded will have already guessed – the full-blown sequel. That said, without the addition of the number two in the title, even non-simpletons would struggle to tell the difference.

THE GAME REMAINS THE SAME
Perversely, Infogrames appears to have inadvertently acknowleged this fact in its promotional material, courtesy of one of the most blatant examples of misquoting we've ever seen. Back in issue 117, a short news story announced the pending game thus: "The original *RollerCoaster Tycoon* may be partly responsible for the flood of tycoon games that currently afflicts the PC market, but it was

nonetheless a brilliant game." Through the magic of the Infogrames marketing department, this was quoted – in reference to *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2*, remember – as "A brilliant game" – *PC ZONE* July 2002. Hilarious. You almost have to admire their chutzpah (as well as their 30 grand salaries and company cars).

Nevertheless, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* certainly was a largely

features and coasters, it's identical, and at best can be described as a glorified expansion pack.

THIEF OF TIME
But hey, perhaps you weren't playing PC games three and a half years ago, and *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* allows you to experience that classic gameplay in the modern era. And it's as disgustingly

"In the time it can take to get a viable theme park up and running, you could've flown to the US or watched four major motion pictures"

brilliant game. Back in April 1999, erstwhile *ZONE* gimp Charlie Brooker (whatever happened to him?) described it as "ludicrously moreish," despite berating the graphics for being "a bit on the Amiga side." Well, both of those descriptions apply today, because it's the same sodding game! The same graphics, the same interface, the same rides. Barring a couple of new

addictive as ever. Whether starting from scratch, or attempting to manage one of the pre-built parks, it sucks you in and eats up the hours of your life like some giant voracious carnivore.

It really is quite appalling. In the time it can take to get a viable theme park up and running, you

The Tapeworm proved a hit with visitors.

Graphically, little has changed since the original.

could have flown to the US, watched four major motion pictures, or even simply had a good night's sleep. Instead, all you've really done is facilitate the notional entertainment of a couple of thousand pretend funseekers, made a few pretend quid and cleaned their pretend sick off the pretend sidewalk.

What's the point? It's not as if there's even any tangible reward for completing the scenarios, all of which are available from the outset (along with the option to design your own). Once you've achieved the requisite goals, you're simply presented with an anti-climactic message of congratulations. You then have the option to carry on regardless, or switch the sodding thing off and get on with your life.

At least with other chronically addictive games such as *Championship Manager*, for instance, there's something to show for your efforts when you return to the game, be it

playing in a higher division or reaping the benefits of securing the services of a mercurial striker. All you've got in *RollerCoaster Tycoon (2)* is a great big expanse of people eating, drinking, pissing and having fun.

ICE CREAM VAN
That fun can be administered in many ways, the most effective being the application of unnatural G-forces. Rollercoasters can either be placed in situ ready-made, or painstakingly constructed yourself. The latter option is the more ambitious, but shouldn't be entered into without a degree of Zen-like patience, as in the frustration stakes it's like attempting to plait snot.

And compared to the ready-made designs, the coasters you make yourself usually look like something a bunch of drunk scaffolders put together for a laugh. Nevertheless, actually managing to create a

"It's a great big expanse of people eating, drinking, pissing and having fun"

working coaster is mildly satisfying, particularly when punters start queueing in their droves to hand over their hard-earned cash in order to ride it.

Squeezing money out of the patrons is by and large the key

to success, and it's amazing how ruthless a taste of big business can make you. Much as I loathe the practice in real life, within the game I have no hesitation in charging guests for what many consider the basic

human right of taking a piss. No more than 20 pence mind, I'm not an animal.

MONORAIL! MONORAIL!
Furthermore, at the merest hint of rain I'll happily whack a pound

DESIGNER DRAGS

HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER
In what is actually an advance from the original game, this sequel enables you to create your own rides separately from the game, using the all-new RollerCoaster Designer. Away from the fiscal, geological and time pressures of a live scenario, you can tweak your creation to perfection, test it for safety, functionality and excitement, and then save it for importing into a game at a later date. And if you're really proud of your handiwork, you can even trade it with other fanatics via the website.

Let your creative juices flow with the RollerCoaster editor

There are an exhaustive amount of options when building your own rides.

Mine Train Coaster
Mine train themed roller coaster trains career along steel roller coaster track made to look like old railway track

4 designs available, or custom-designed layout   **Cost:** from £3,050

Wooden rollercoasters, the theme park equivalent of real ale.

"*RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* is a heady mix of flamboyance and practicality"

on the price of umbrellas, and come summertime you won't find an ice cream for less than two quid. What else are they going to do? Shop around? Yep, the captive audience are at your whim, and providing you can keep them captive, they will begrudgingly hand over the readies.

It's not all about money though, and it's possible to take pride in your work. It is with particular affection that I recall the day my first monorail opened, transporting guests from one end of the park to the other in an efficient yet leisurely manner. In conjunction with a decent marketing campaign, it proved a roaring success, offering a reasonably priced opportunity to

simultaneously see the sights and save your legs.

RUBBISH

RollerCoaster Tycoon (2) is a heady mix of flamboyance and practicality, with the big rides augmented by more mundane issue such as paths and litter. The interface can be overtly fiddly though. For instance, raising and lowering land has to be done a (small) square at a time, which is not only incredibly tedious, but irreversible too. There's also an option to build coasters underground, but this is

so fiddly it's best avoided. And only being able to rotate the scenery 90 degrees at a time, again causes inevitable problems.

Ultimately though, there is enough here for several late

SIX FLAGS, NO BALLS

CAREFUL, YOU'LL DO YOURSELF A MISCHIEF

In the latest incidence of what is becoming an increasingly sinister trend, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* comes with a hefty in-game endorsement. However, unlike McDonalds' lucrative hijacking of *The Sims Online*, the partnership with the Six Flags theme park company is at least integral to the fabric of the game. *RCT2* includes a host of authentic Six Flags coasters, as well as a smattering of actual locations. These include Six Flags Magic Mountain in California, the scene of a *PC ZONE* outing during this year's E3 show that proved particularly memorable for reviews ed Martin Korda. After tackling one of the more gravity-defying rides, the musclebound behemoth staggered ashen-faced from his seat, confiding in editor Dave Woods that he'd ruptured his scrotum (I think you'll find my exact words were, "Burst a bollock" – Martin). Thankfully it proved to be a false alarm, and normal service has since been resumed.

Six Flags in California, where Korda nearly lost his manhood.

nights, and I myself have been party to a couple of 6am finishes. How long the grip lasts is debatable though, and after a couple of lengthy sessions you do begin to get the impression that you've seen it all before. And not just three and a half years ago. **PCZ**

The speed of rides can be tracked in a window.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

DON'T JUST WATCH IT, RIDE IT

Unless you're a great big coward, rollercoasters are for riding, not looking at. It would have been a nice touch to include a 3D engine that actually allows you to experience your creations in first person. This was attempted – mainly unsuccessfully – in *Theme Park World* a few years ago, but if they'd done it properly here, they could have almost justified calling it a sequel.

"You're not getting me on that thing."

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Utterly absorbing
✔ Immensely detailed
✔ Perversely satisfying
✘ Sickeningly cheery
✘ Seen it all before
✘ Eventually tiresome

80

Up and down

The vertical drop is deadly.
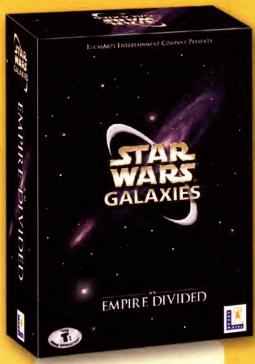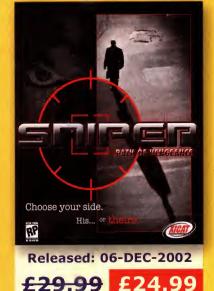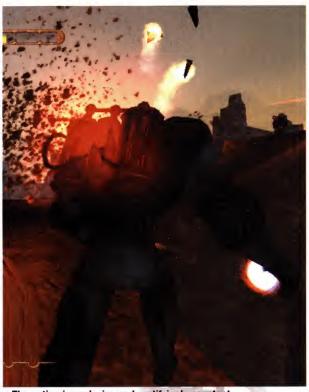
PROJECT NOMADS

■ £29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Radon Labs | ETA: Late 2002 | www.project-nomads.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 128Mb 3D card

The forecast is good for the 3D action/strategy genre as *Keith Pullin* heads for the clouds

The action is explosive and gratifyingly constant.

Island attacked

There are more than 40 different types of enemy to overcome.

THERE'S only one thing worse than being locked in a room with an *EastEnders* scriptwriter, and that's being locked in a room with an action/adventure game scriptwriter. The horrible truth is that plots for most 3D action games are so excruciatingly banal you'd rather put leeches on your eyeballs than read the dross that appears at the beginning of most manuals.

For once though, we have good news. *Project Nomads'* storyline is unique in so far as it appears not to have been hastily contrived on the back of a fag packet after the rest of the game was finished. So, without giving too much away, here's the deal. The aim of *Project Nomads* is to exact revenge upon a group of beings known as the Sentinels, who destroyed the Nomads' home world and left it as fragments floating around in space. Playing as a Nomad with a large floating lump of rock (or island if you prefer) as your 'ship', you must 'sail' your way around the

"The storyline appears not to have been hastily contrived on the back of a fag packet"

remains of your old world to kill the Sentinels and their leader, and find other Nomads.

OK, so it may not sound like award-winning material – if anything it sounds a bit rubbish. But judging by the intricate structure of the game itself, it's a fair bet the plot for *Project Nomads* existed long before the first line of code.

ROCK STEADY
Although first and foremost *Project Nomads* is a no-nonsense action game, there's a wonderfully subtle RTS aspect to it. Basically, in order to reach the other floating fragments, you transform your island into a kind of flying fortress by constructing special buildings. You do this by picking up building icons (or

artefacts) which can be found scattered across the floating landscapes, or by destroying enemy buildings.

The most important structure you can build is your watchtower, which is basically your island's engine. Without this you won't be able to sail anywhere. The second most valuable add-on is your

WALKTHROUGH →

THERE'LL BE NO ISLAND HOPPING FOR YOU UNLESS YOU KNOW HOW TO TURN YOUR BARE ROCK INTO A BATTLE ISLAND...

1 After being attacked by a wing of Sentinel fighters, the game begins with you crash-landing on a remote island.

2 By briefly exploring your surroundings you come across an ancient being known as a master builder.

3 As a reward the master builder gives you a lighthouse artefact that forms the heart of your island.

4 Suitably impressed with your skills, he gives you a watchtower, so you can move between islands.

All that's missing is R2D2 in the back.

Bombers can be lethal. Use your heavy cannon quick.

lighthouse. This is the heart of your island and if that's destroyed it's game over – simple as that. On top of these essential structures you can have other placements such as gun turrets, aircraft hangars, power plants, collectors, and artefact storage units.

ISLAND BREEZE
One of the most outstanding features of *Project Nomads* (apart from its original game design) is its variety. At the start of the game you can choose from three different characters: Goliath, John and Susie. As you might expect, each character has distinct strengths and weaknesses. Goliath's gun emplacements are the most powerful (if a little on the slow side). Susie on the other hand has a slightly weaker gun that fires much more rapidly. It goes without saying of course that the final character, John, is a jack-of-all-trades – he's the guy to pick if you want a bit of everything.
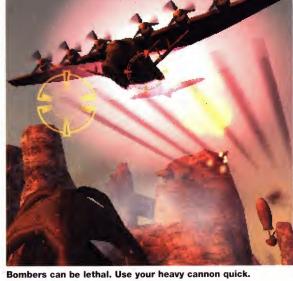
Standard stuff of course. However, what is unique about this initial choice is that it also radically alters the look of your island. Susie, for example, has very elegant, fragile-looking buildings, whereas the sturdier Goliath has much tougher structures. Basically the personality of your character is stamped on the graphics, and ultimately the entire game.

The visual appeal of *Project Nomads* is staggering. The backgrounds are moody, the floating islands are suitably eerie and the textures of the

Does my bum look big in this?

buildings and aircraft are superb. There's even a constant wind that rustles through the branches of the trees, as well as a full day/night cycle.

If there is a criticism it's that some of the miscellaneous monsters you see wandering around the islands are a bit bland. You get the distinct impression that when it comes to creating great-looking adversaries, Radon Labs focused its imagination on the Sentinels and nothing else.

The sound is also great. The effects for the explosions are particularly booming, and in a stroke of pure brilliance the apocalyptic tone of the narrated cut-scenes sounds almost professional. Once again, a privilege not often associated with 3D action/adventures...

HAPPILY ENGAGED
Project Nomads offers several different ways to engage the

enemy and generally it's up to you to decide which method is appropriate at the time. The first method of attack is the simple gun turret. This immobile, yet effective primary defence of your island is great for taking out incoming Sentinel aircraft. The next and highly risky attack option is by foot. However, these ground skirmishes are rare, as they only tend to happen when your island docks with another island. The other problem with attacking or indeed travelling by foot is the collision detection; for some reason you often get stuck

Jetpacks are great fun – but not the easiest to control.

5 Our friendly master builder throws in a gun emplacement too, so that you can defend yourself.

6 With the basics in place it's time to visit the Grey Market. Here you can find other handy artefacts.

7 Your island is now fully equipped for battle. Now you're ready to venture out and kill some bad guys.

If you steal an enemy fighter, you'd better know how to fly it.

Buildings under repair sparkle. When the sparkling stops, the building will be back to full strength.

on sloping landscapes. While this is not a major problem, it does lead to frustration.

Ultimately, when it comes to serious fighting, it's the plane that gets the most mileage. The weaving, spiralling, death-defying manoeuvres of aerial combat form around two-thirds of the game. Not that you ever get bored though; the great thing about the plane is that you can switch in and out of it at will; and when you're not manning it, it simply reverts to automatic pilot.

FLOATING POINT
There are eight main quests in Project Nomads with numerous

sub-quests thrown in for good measure. One such mini-diversion sees you stealing a Sentinel aircraft and then pretending to be part of an enemy squadron by staying in tight formation as you fly through some canyons. There are of course the out-and-out blasting missions to settle into, but at the same time there are still tricky tactical decisions to make to keep you at least partially on your toes.

For example, during a raid on some Sentinel AA guns, your own floating base comes under attack from an enemy bomber. At this point you have to

ROCKET-POWERED

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Cinemaware's old classic in all its glory.

See any similarities?

The bulk of the action in Project Nomads takes place in the skies either using your jetpack or in a plane. The jetpack is great fun and is activated by double-clicking the jump button. After that it's a case of steering up or down with the mouse or the designated keys. Admittedly it is slightly tricky to get the hang of at first, but it soon makes

sense. Ironically you probably won't be using it that much as jetpack fuel is rare.

Curiously the whole feel of zooming around the sky has more than a passing resemblance to Cinemaware's old classic Rocket Ranger. If you ever played that gem, it's fair to say you'll know exactly what to expect in Project Nomads.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY ⊙

LET GO OF MY HAND MUM!

The only real thing missing from Project Nomads is some trading and a bit of non-linearity. It would be nice to choose which island to travel to next, as opposed to being led by the hand from one to another. In this type of game there is a danger of losing focus if it's too open-ended, but it would have been great if the developers could have found that happy medium.

All that's left of your world is a set of floating islands. It's time to get some payback.

"Project Nomads is a thrilling experience and one hell of a polished game"

Island attacked

Sentinels attacking under the cover of darkness can be hard to hit.

decide whether to continue your assault, or hit the Tab key to instantly flip back to a cannon on your own island and blow the infidel out of the sky. If you bear in mind that a single strafing run from an enemy bomber can take out your lighthouse, these kind of decisions are not to be taken lightly.

Which pretty much goes for the whole game too. Project Nomads is a thrilling experience that should not be underestimated. Fair enough, it has its quirky collision detection problems, and if you want to be extra critical you could say it could do with a few more missions just to edge up the longevity. However, if it's longevity you're after there's always the LAN/Internet multiplayer game.

Overall, Project Nomads is one hell of a polished game. If you're looking for a playable, original action game with a hint of strategy you won't get much better than this. Go find those Nomads now. PCZ
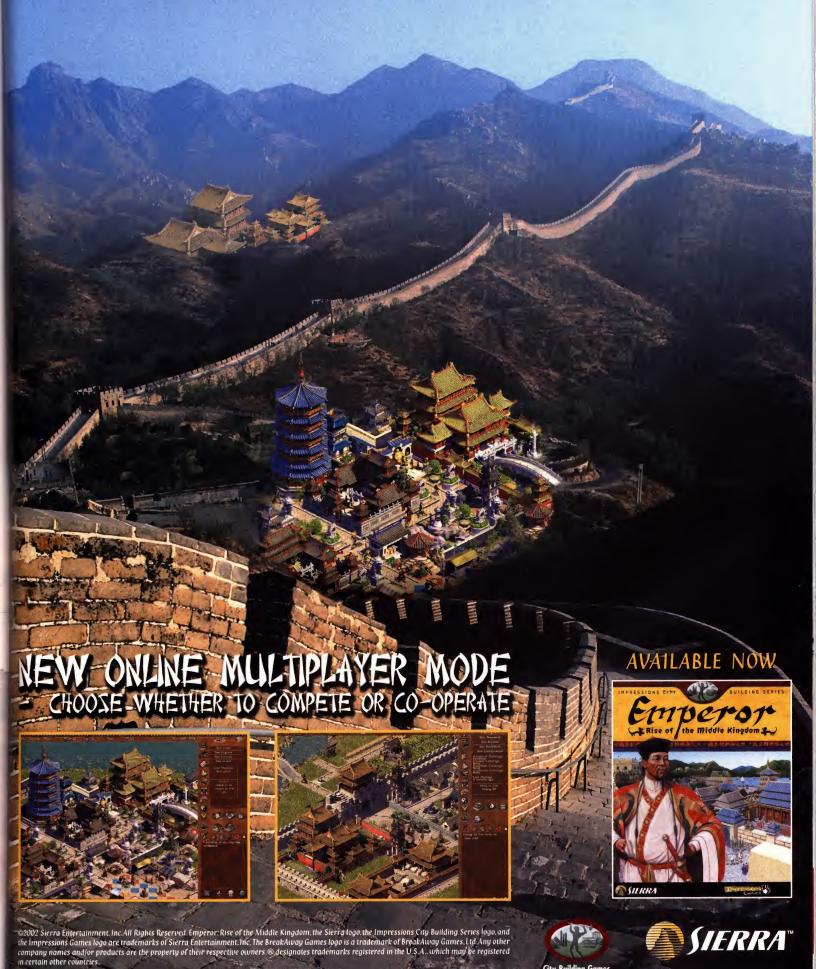
PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Relentlessly action-packed
✔ Fantastic story
✔ Multiple gameplay styles
✔ Wonderful aesthetics
✗ Poor collision detection
✗ Some bland enemies

85

Original, explosive and wholly satisfying

O Points

200 Points

O Points

The school run ended in disarray.

Some very autumnal scenery. Not a dealbreaker.

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2

"This is a glorified console game that actually lacks some of the features of its TV-based counterparts"

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: EA Seattle | ETA: Out now | www.needforspeed.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Steve Hill evades the police yet again in this sequel of a sequel of a sequel

IF YOU'RE surprised to see this being reviewed already, don't blame us. We attempted to bring you a preview several months ago, but were bizarrely scuppered by Electronic Arts. Having dispatched a list of generic questions to the powers that be, a wall of silence ensued, eventually followed by the revelation that the bulk of them were considered inappropriate. An example of one of the

offending questions: 'Are there any features specific to the PC?' To our minds, that's scarcely a sickening intrusion into the machinations of what is, after all, a game. Nevertheless, the answers weren't forthcoming, and the preview had to be dropped. If they don't have confidence in their own product, then it's difficult for us to.

IN HOT PURSUIT
As it turns out, it seems we may have hit a nerve, as this is, on closer inspection, a glorified console game that actually lacks some of the features of its TV-based counterparts. PC gamers of more than five years vintage may recall the original Hot Pursuit title, namely *Need For Speed III: Hot Pursuit*. It was the most successful of the *NFS*

series, hence this sequel/ remake, which complicates the heritage further. It's a bit like releasing a film called *Jaws 3D II: Sharp Teeth*.

Either way, it's a next generation rendition of the classic game, with all the fancy motors and cop-baiting that entailed. Naturally, it looks impressive enough, featuring reflections, puffs of smoke and dramatic scenery, as you'd expect from a modern racing game. The arcade stylings are still in place, and whatever car you're driving, the handling largely involves throwing it around the track at breakneck pace, with only occasional regard given to such mundane matters as safety and braking.

The cars are plentiful though, with some 20 featured, including

the Lamborghini Murcielago and Ferrari 360 Spider, which will no doubt be of great excitement to *Top Gear*-loving readers. And unlike in many games, the manufacturers have actually agreed to their cars being damaged, with bonnets and boots often flapping precariously in the breeze.

CHASE ME
The main treat of the original game were the police chases, which have now been expanded upon, with several types of car, and even police helicopters that drop exploding barrels on suspected felons. You can also be the cop, although perversely not in multiplayer mode, which is a rather huge oversight.

Other than that, it's a passable mix of races and

challenges, with a multi-pathed championship mode opening up depending on your success in previous events. While it's certainly an enjoyable and polished arcade romp, perhaps EA was right, as ultimately there isn't much to shout about. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Looks great
✔ Variety of options
✔ 20 licenced cars
✘ No cop vs felon multiplayer
✘ Unexceptional handling
✘ Seen it all before

69

There really was no need

Sacre bleu! A blue angel!

Whatever happened to that band, eh?

ARCHANGEL

■ £29.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: Metropolis Software | ETA: Out Now
www.archangel-online.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Newly appointed religious-themed games expert *James Lyon* tackles mediocrity of biblical proportions

Bland identikit locations are everywhere. Everywhere.

The excitement here is sorely misrepresented.

The *PC ZONE* staff meeting reconvenes.

HMM. LET'S run off the requirements for an average fantasy action-adventure and see if this one fits the bill, shall we? First off, a village with less than four houses and inbred villagers with nothing more than one line of speech repeated over and over. Yes, *Archangel* has these. A plot that involves a muscle-bound man seeking to fulfil a destiny foretold by crusty mystics. Yup. Bad speech, bad animation, no attempt at proper lip-synching. Uh-huh. Featureless caves, swamps and dungeons. Undoubtedly. Quests to retrieve pointless items, boiling down to killing things, picking up items and bringing them back. Of course.

And just when you're getting tired of it, it turns into an average sci-fi fantasy action-adventure instead, what with the requisite mix of corrupt corporations, hi-tech corridors, angular cities with no visible exits and next to no citizens. Fancy that.

LACKING IN SPIRIT

It looks like *Archangel* does the lot in the face of averageness. But wait. It adds its own special sauce to the recipe. The Spirit Meter is a horribly bad idea that should have been stifled at birth. It's rubbish. It's the only source of energy for your magic weapon and spells, but it takes an achingly long time to replenish.

Worse still, it's the only way of dispatching some enemies, so you end up hiding in a corner waiting for it to fill up again. Not much fun to be had there then.

ANGEL AND THE APE

Archangel doesn't have huge levels, but they're big enough to wonder why they didn't include an easy teleportation system. Instead you wind up having to trudge round the map from one end to the other (presumably they think this will make the game seem longer). Worse than that though is the abundance of large empty areas which yield nothing when explored. There may be a little extra ammo hidden in a corner, yet there's nothing else to reward searching. For example, one area set in a hotel replicates the exact same floor three times with

only one room of importance. It's just one of the signs of limited interactivity. Apart from a smattering of switches, ammo and medikits, there's nothing to do. Look but don't touch. Richard Garriott must be spinning in his beard.

It's also a linear game. Some quests can be done before others to a certain extent, but it's usually just easier to follow the storyline; a filler of a plot cribbed from similar past games that all did this ten times better. Enemies don't make the grade either. Running at you with little to no grace, they make easy-to-kill experience fodder for a weak upgrade system.

Archangel is a game of two halves, a fitting cliché for a clichéd game.

It tries half-heartedly to be too many things, and ends up spreading itself thin. At best it feels like an extended mod, but most of the time it's just going through the motions. **PCZ**

> **"A game of two halves – a fitting cliché for a clichéd game"**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Two genres, one game
✔ Excellent graphics
✘ Repetitive
✘ Hollow
✘ Weak combat
✘ Weak upgrades

58

Tries to copy the big boys. And fails

ROBOT WARS: EXTREME DESTRUCTION

■ £24.99 | Pub: BBC Multimedia | Dev: Gamezlab | ETA: Out Now
www.bbcworldwide.com/multimedia

REQUIRES PII 500 MHz, 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** Athlon 1GHz and an 8Mb 3D card

Can *Phil Wand* triumph using a selection of components from his Gran's wheelchair and his nephew's baby buggy?

Hypnodisc's destructive powers appear to have been diluted.

The more exciting camera angles often restrict your view.

AS YOU may know, there are in fact just three categories of contestant on *Robot Wars*. The first is the family outing, where dad comes decked out in his funeral suit and a pair of '80s Ray Bans. Dad's friend Ken is in similar attire, only the suit is a size too small and the shades are from a 99p carousel outside Boots. Sonny is wearing his school uniform and is obviously delighted with his creation, a Fisher Price affair that ends up malfunctioning, on fire, or only going in circles within ten seconds of the start. Ken paws the remote and Sonny quivers his bottom lip while the TV audience howls with laughter.

The second form of contestant is the team of nutters. Here, men with beards talk about voltage regulators and strontium carbonate pickaxes. Their spokesman is eloquent and verbose, the others smile weakly and waggle the aerial. They all have potbellies, T-shirts bearing the name of their local pub, and a remote control so comprehensive that it comes in two sections.

LET BATTLE COMMENCE

The third and final contestant is the mad loner. That's who you get to play in the second instalment of the BBC's *Robot Wars* franchise, *Extreme Destruction*. It's just you and your mechanical roller-skate taking on the house robots and some of the more familiar contraptions from the early evening TV show. Jonathan Pearce lends his autobahn voice to the proceedings and so does the bloke who says: "Cease!"

The opening menu allows you to choose between arcade-style action, where you pick a name and start fighting, and the Robot Builder, where you browse a catalogue of parts and piece together a

Build your own robot. Better still, buy a ready-made one.

machine from scratch. You can also take your flimsy death machine up against your mate's in the two-player split-screen mode (Xbox owners are spoiled with a four-way split).

Visually the game is rather lacklustre, but considering real-life *Robot Wars* is all angles and battleship emulsion it's not a sticking point. The sounds are a definite weak area, failing to rumble subs or wake neighbours even at high volume. But

the biggest disappointment of all is the controls. On a regular remote the sticks are analogue, allowing fractional movements to be transmitted, but a keyboard is digital and the keys are either on or off. You can't do gentle turns or move at half speed, making some manoeuvres impossible and a joystick essential.

XBOX MARKS THE SPOT

Play the game for any length of time and it's clear it's been aimed at console gamers. There's no network support, with multiple players squeezed onto one monitor. There is no real depth to the game, the emphasis being on instant gratification. Strategy doesn't feature, with fights limited to broadsiding your opponents and clobbering the fire button until their bits fall off. Is that really what you want from £1,000 of hardware? **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

ROBOFORGE
Reviewed Issue 116, Score 83%
Roboforge features AI-programmable robots. Low on the adrenaline scale but enjoyable all the same.

ROBOT WARS: ARENAS OF DESTRUCTION
Reviewed Issue 112, Score 56%
The first game wasn't amazing. The second game isn't amazing. There's a pattern developing here…

PCZONE VERDICT
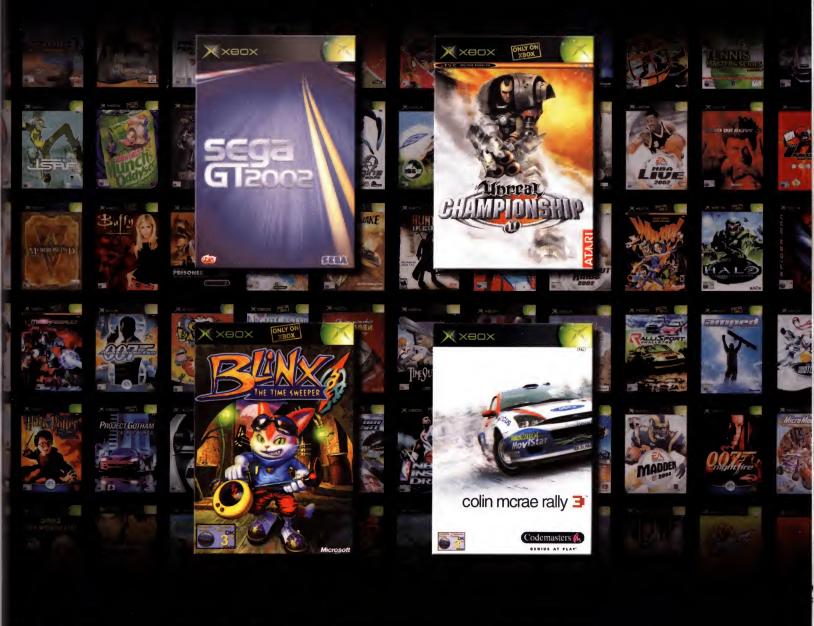
✔ Just like Robots Wars
✔ Instant action
✔ New arenas with unique features
✘ Little comeback factor
✘ Little depth
✘ Sound is on the weak side

54

Another one for the consoles

"Men with beards talk about voltage regulators and strontium carbonate pickaxes"

PLAY NOVEMBER.

SEGA GT 2002

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XBOX

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Driving and shooting: so much fun on their own, so why does it always go wrong when they're combined?

This dull racing level is spiced up by a bug that fails to detect checkpoints.

BANDITS: PHOENIX RISING

■ £TBC | Pub: Pan Vision | Dev: GRIN | ETA: December
www.bandits-game.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128 Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card
DESIRES P4 1Gb, 128 Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

No robot women, no gladiatorial arenas? *Anthony Holden* **has seen better apocalyptic aftermaths...**

SOME games really just take their subject matter too seriously. Take *Bandits: Phoenix Rising* for example. I mean, we all know that life in a post-apocalyptic wasteland would be pretty grim. Roaming a ruined, featureless wilderness in a scrap metal shitbox, none but bloodthirsty vultures and slow-witted gang members for company, constantly battling for meagre resources in a wearisome and ultimately futile struggle for survival in a world devoid of life and hope. It's no one's idea of a picnic, is it?

But just because you're setting a game in a shitty post-apocalyptic world, it doesn't mean you have to simulate the experience right down to the suffering and futility, the relentless, life-sapping tedium. Unfortunately, *Bandits* manages to do just that.

Along the way you have to engage in missions such as convoy raids, escort runs, canyon races and all-out gang clashes, all the while piloting your junked-up combat car, the Badger. There's also an upgrade system where you can earn new name, but they're merciless killers and really quite unkind, OK?)

weapons and parts for your car. In short, all the ingredients for a fun arcade blast-about – or so you'd think.

drab, the combat repetitive and painstaking. The upgrade system is so poorly balanced you will have stopped caring long before you get to the more desirable weapons such as the sniper gun and missile launcher. And while some semblance of

a plot does eventually emerge – something to do with raiding a city stronghold for a stash of gold and a mysterious doomsday weapon called the Phoenix – it's really not a patch on *Beyond Thunderdome*. Not only that but there's one or two annoying bugs in the mix as well.

In its favour, the game is very well presented and technically proficient, taking advantage of all the latest graphics card tricks such as hardware T&L, pixel-shading and chrome-mapping, whatever that is. But of course only those with top-end systems will be able to appreciate such wizardry. The multiplayer deathmatches are also vaguely distracting, and you have the delightful option of uploading the truly awful dance/metal soundtrack to your MP3 player, but otherwise, there's very little to be salvaged from this brown stain of a game. We'd only recommend it if you're looking for a chore, though you might want to try cleaning behind the fridge first. **PCZ**

"There's very little to be salvaged from this brown stain of a game"

INPERSPECTIVE

STEALTH COMBAT
Reviewed Issue 117 Score 57%
Another futuristic vehicular combat game, another low score. Some of the missions in *Stealth Combat* look remarkably like *Bandits*, but this game also allows you to command a range of vehicles such as mechs, tanks and choppers.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
Reviewed Issue 117, Score 95%
You like driving? Huh? You like shooting? Do you? Then you'll love this game, you stinking mook. It's got loads of driving and shooting, though usually not at the same time.

BADLANDS
The worst thing is, this really should have been a fun game. It's from Swedish developer GRIN (makers of the ridiculously fast future racer *Ballistics*), a company that prides itself on making games that are fast, easy to play and above all, fun. What's more, the concept is a sound one. You're part of a notorious gang of driving, looting, shooting desperados called the Wolfpack, on a mission to raise hell and outsmart rival gangs such as the Crusaders and the Flaming Pumpkins. (Yes it's a ridiculous

CRUEL AND TWISTED METAL
Somehow, *Bandits* manages to be one of the dullest experiences I've had since being stuck in a lift for four hours with a group of IT professionals and a cardboard sandwich. It's not the worst game ever, it's just that, like a true post-apocalyptic hinterland, there's really very little going on. The environments are uniformly

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Looks nice on high-end systems
✔ Eight-way multiplayer
✘ Indescribably dull
✘ Bland, lifeless environments
✘ High system requirements
✘ Atrocious Scottish accents

35

Like a mouthful of desert sand

Setting up a settlement is a painstakingly mundane process.
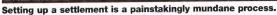
These men are wondering why they're in such a bad game.

DRAGON THRONE – THE BATTLE OF RED CLIFFS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Object Software | ETA: Nov 22 | www.objectsw.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb and a 4Mb graphics card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 128Mb and an 8Mb 3D card

Steve O'Hagan feels like dropping this under-par RTS off a cliff

THERE WAS a time when the words 'Made in China' meant the toy you held was a shoddy, often dangerous copy of a Western product. Teddy bears with ill-sown beady eyes that could choke a child. Plastic soldiers that would go up like a Roman candle if you even lit a cigarette in the same room. But standards rose, and before long, everything from Barbie to Action Man was being manufactured in that most populous country, and to the highest of standards.

Well, it looks like that same trend has begun, only this time, in the realm of computer games. First came *Three Kingdoms: Fate Of The Dragon* (which proved to be a fairly solid RTS on its release two years ago), and now, from the same chinese developer, comes *Dragon Throne: Battle*

Though, as far as we know, it's in no way hazardous.

UNLEASH THE DRAGON
The game follows a civil war fought in medieval China. The three campaigns allow you to assume the roles of one of three warlords, and your commanders

"It's all so mundane and derivative that even the odd twist can't redeem it"

Of Red Cliffs, a historical RTS and almost identical game. The engine has aged so badly that *Dragon Throne* now plays like a tacky, ill-conceived simulacrum.

gain experience and acquire new powers and extra health as the story goes on.

Before the carnage is unleashed, though, the familiar

Battles are pretty mindless.

rigmarole of setting up an economy awaits. As in strategy games such as *Age Of Empires* or *Stronghold*, this should be a pleasure. Here it is an all too familiar chore that any RTS fan could accomplish in their sleep, compounded by an ugly interface. Chop down trees, harvest grain, mine stone – it's all so mundane that even the odd twist such as having to breed the horses, which you then use as steeds for cavalry, can't redeem it. Other interesting touches, such as natural disasters and a sacrifice system to appease the gods, similarly get buried in the tedium of the building malarkey.

MULTIMAPS.COM
As in *Earth 2150*, missions here can take place on interrelating maps. One map may represent the wilderness, and another the city, with a gateway allowing units to cross between the two. Visually, it's weak, with tiny, ill-animated troops, and basic, repetitive geography. Your guys get lost behind trees, they can't be organised into formations, and they mill about with all the intelligence of a group of clock-work toys in the tactic-less battles.

Your heroes' special powers such as summoning ghostly warriors and unleashing thunderous attacks are vital in a fight, but finding the right buttons to click or bizarrely placed hotkey to hit at the right moment can be a brutally frustrating task.

Attempts to introduce cut-scenes using the game engine are disastrous, leaving you wondering who is saying what?

No doubt they'll be a force to be reckoned with in the future, but for now this is one Chinese developer that needs to go back to the drawing board and have a drastic rethink. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

AGE OF KINGS – GOLD EDITION
Reviewed Issue 84, Score 90%
Much the same as this, only set in Europe. Despite its years, it looks and plays better than this pale imitation. Better still, check out the third instalment in the series, *Age Of Mythology*, reviewed this issue.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
If you're after a sprinkling of RPG elements in your RTS soup, then Blizzard's highly anticipated fantasy adventure/strategy hybrid is the chef's recommendation on today's menu.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Runs on most systems
✔ Missions play on multiple maps
✘ Feels like a collage of other titles
✘ Unwieldy interface
✘ Visually poor
✘ Battles lack tactics

48

Been there, done that

Putting is difficult but there are plenty of aids and views to help.

Whacking off by yourself again.

LINKS 2003

■ £34.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Microsoft | ETA: Out Now | www.links2003.com

REQUIRES PII 400, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 900, 128Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

And there was *Keith Pullin* thinking Americans knew nothing about golf

AFTER the United States' recent Ryder Cup thrashing you would have thought American enthusiasm for golf would have cooled. Not so. When *Links 2003* was released in the US at exactly the same time as the Jack Ryder Trophy was being relinquished by the US, thousands of gamers rushed out, bought a copy, and logged on to the multiplayer server in an effort to drown their sorrows.

And so, right now *Links 2003* is a popular pastime. There are so many types of competition including ladder play, email tournaments, virtual tours and more, that even the most untalented yanker stands a chance of winning something.

FEEL THE FORCE

What also helps is that for the first time ever in a *Links* game, there's a real-time swing option. For those of you unfamiliar with this, it basically means you can move your mouse down and then up to mimic the motion of a real club swinging through the ball. This option alone gives *PGA 2000* fans something to ponder, as effectively it was the reason why *PGA 2000* was better than *Links* in the first place. In fact, when it comes to the multiplayer game, *Links 2003* is now probably the more complete experience. The only drawback is that you can't see your opponents in 'fast play' mode, which is a little disconcerting as it highlights the fact that you really don't have any friends.
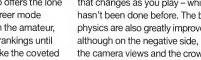
THE PERFECT BLEND

Like *Links 2001*, the Arnold Palmer course designer is part of the package. Already there are more than 500 courses at www.linkscorner.com – which is good news as, if you're anything like us, you'll quickly tire of the five standard courses.

Links 2003 also offers the lone golfer a superb career mode taking you through the amateur, semi-pro and pro rankings until eventually you make the coveted invitational tournaments. It's also worth mentioning that the skill setting caters for everyone from *Links* experts to novices – and just to make sure there's a tutorial covering everything from whacking off to putting.
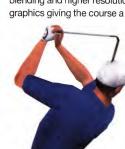
Other improvements include new pro golfer models, fairway blending and higher resolution graphics giving the course a much more realistic feel. *Links 2003* also offers variable weather that changes as you play – which hasn't been done before. The ball physics are also greatly improved, although on the negative side, the camera views and the crowd

"For the first time ever there's a real-time swing option"

noise could do with some sprucing up. Watch out too for render times on low-spec machines; you can sit around for anything up to 30 seconds waiting for a scene to be drawn.

That said, there's no doubting the quality here. Come in *PGA 2000* your time is up – *Links 2003* is the new king. All that remains now is for Tiger to come up with a reply, though if the Belfry is anything to go by, we could be waiting a long time. **PCZ**

Nice scenery, however the camerawork is disappointing.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Hugely improved graphics
✔ New real-time swing
✔ Variable weather during round
✔ Huge amount of tourneys in single and multiplayer
✘ Limited camera views
✘ Rendering takes a while on low-spec machines

82

Back at the top of the leaderboard

You might steal from the rich, but the only poor to receive anything are the beggars who sell you maps.
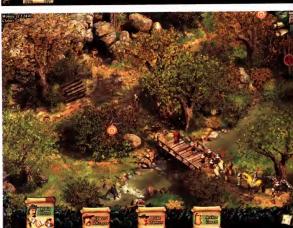
You have to play some repetitive forest ambushes, all of which take place in the same couple of locations.

ROBIN HOOD: THE LEGEND OF SHERWOOD

■ £29.99 | Pub: Wanadoo | Dev: Spellbound | ETA: November 15 | www.robinhood-game.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM and a GeForce 2 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 500 and 128Mb RAM

How can men who live in trees be so merry? *Mark Hill* ponders the Sherwood puzzle

COMMANDOS was one of the biggest hits ever in Germany, so it's not surprising that they've turned the hard-as-nails puzzle-based strategy gameplay into an industry of its own, started by developer Spellbound and its excellent game *Desperados*. But building a *Commandos*-type game around cowboys is one thing; it's quite another to do the same with Robin Hood.

Thankfully, this Robin is more Errol Flynn than Kevin Costner, and the game's colourful design and light-heartedness give it a certain charm. The concept works rather well, despite the obvious lack of guns, with the bow and arrow working as some sort of sniper rifle and a greater emphasis on hand to hand combat. To make this close-range combat a more integral part of the gameplay, you can perform different types of sword swing by making shapes with your mouse. But this is still a highly tactical puzzle game where, as always, a tremendous amount of patience is required to get past even the earliest levels.

MEN IN TIGHTS

The amount of detail is as exhaustive as ever, and you're constantly learning new things you can do, ways to manipulate the environment and abilities to exploit. You can distract soldiers by throwing bags of money, disguise a character as a beggar, lure enemies into traps, distract them with whistles and so on. It's entertaining in a devilishly frustrating kind of way, as you constantly try to find ways to get past impossible situations.

The problem is, since *Desperados* came out, we've had the fabulous *Commandos 2*, which has catapulted this mini-genre into a whole new realm of detail, fun and immersion. By comparison, Robin Hood feels restrictive and dated.

The biggest sticking point is that, once you've gotten used to *Commandos 2*'s 3D camera, which allows you to turn the map 360 degrees and see behind buildings, Robin Hood's 2D approach seems like a massive step backwards. Not least because there are times when you genuinely feel like seeing what's behind that barn, when seeing the world from a different angle would make things much easier. And, unlike *C2*, most doors don't lead to interiors, but instead act as hiding places.

FREE AND MERRY

There are some distinctive touches, such as the Sherwood base of operations you return to after each mission, where you can train your merry men (each of which has a simple combat stat) and collect the resources you need in your adventures (stones, apples, arrows and so on). And you can hand-pick who you take with you on each adventure, which gives you a greater feeling of freedom and control than you sometimes get in *Commandos 2*. But somehow, the whole swords and arrows approach falls short of World War II scenarios or cowboy shoot-outs, and Robin Hood ends up being a minor if amusing chapter in the hardest of all genres. **PCZ**

"The problem is that, since *Desperados* came out, we've had the fabulous *Commandos 2*"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Lots of detail and good ideas
✔ Colourful and different
✘ Has big gameplay flaws
✘ As frustrating as ever

71

This is a poor man's *Desperados*

ROBOT WARS

EXTREME DESTRUCTION

Official Battle Report

COMPETITOR	Whirlwind	CREATED	NOV 2002
OPPONENT	Sir Killalot	DESTROYED	NOV 2002
ARENA	Sao Paulo Scrapyard		
COMMENTS	Armour insufficient, lacking speed. More wind than whirl!		

LOSER

FORGET THE PAST...THIS IS THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

DESTRUCTION BEGINS NOVEMBER 2002

XBOX

PC CD-ROM

GAME BOY ADVANCE

www.robotwarsthegame.com

'What passing bells for those who die as cattle...'

The third-person view is a bit fish-eye.

IRONSTORM

■ £29.99 | Pub: Wanadoo | Dev: 4X Studio | ETA: October 23 | www.stormgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 256Mb RAM and a GeForce 2 card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a GeForce 3 card

It's 1964, and World War I is far from over. *Mark Hill* reports from the trenches

HERE'S a bit of a shocker. A French game, that is good. And a first-person shooter at that. With decent voice-acting. It's not trying to be wackily funny, it doesn't have bright colours and actually represents a half-decent alternative to *Medal Of Honor*.

Alternative being the key word here. Because *Ironstorm* is set in an alternate version of history, where in 1964 the 1st World War is still raging, now against the Russio-Mongol empire. This means a number of things. First, that while East Germany is still part of the enemy, the West is on your side, thereby removing the gaming cliché that all Germans are evil Nazis. Second, that there are a lot of trenches about, providing a neat replacement for the usual corridormania of most shooters.

ROGUE TROOPER

The presentation, setting, storyline and characters have a definite comic book feel to them (more *2000AD* than *Beano*), while the immersion factor benefits from a properly realised, if slightly off-the-wall, world. You start off in a compound where soldiers go about their business, cooks slave in the kitchen and the wounded stain the infirmary floor crimson. There are also TV terminals where you can watch subtitled broadcast propaganda from the enemy.

A clever and almost unnoticeable loading system makes each level seem huge, and while this can cause you to get lost at times, it gives you the illusion that you're free to roam about. Then you're out in the proper battlefield, caught in an intense firefight among crumbling buildings and you start thinking this could be something truly great.

BUNKERED

The problem is that those open fields constitute a small portion of the game, and you're soon thrust into endless successions of trenches, with nothing but brown walls and the occasional concrete bunker. Just because you can see the sky overhead doesn't mean you're not running through corridors. Fortunately, the environments get much better when you get to the German cities in later levels.

The AI lets the game down with enemies that do little but run back and forth – a failing lazily compensated with their unerring accuracy. One thing the game does well though is explosions, from mortar fire to rocket launchers. Not only does the screen shake, but the sound is so good you'll hide under the desk to avoid falling plaster from the ceiling.

One further oddity is that you can play the game in third-person. It's odd because it's actually a distorted and useless perspective, with the camera pushed into a strange, almost fish-eye lens effect.

It might not be up to *Medal Of Honor*'s standards, but this is still a solid first-person shooter with a charm and appeal all of its own.

"The sound is so good you'll hide under the desk to avoid falling plaster from the ceiling"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Great sound
✔ Original comic book touches
✔ Very immersive
✔ Lots of variety
✘ Poor AI
✘ Too monochrome

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The alternative war shooter

COMBAT MISSION 2: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN

■ £29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Big Time Software | ETA: October 11 | www.cdv.de

REQUIRES P233, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Fix bayonets... Charge! *Daniel Emery* **romps into the USSR with** *Combat Mission 2*

Fire effects are vastly improved from before.

Did I leave the gas on...?

Neighbourhood Watch Soviet-stylee.

HERE'S some useless trivia for you. If we gave you 'a penny for your thoughts', then in one day the average person would earn £40. We kid you not. Which means in 40 minutes you'd make £1.11 – and by a freak coincidence *Combat Mission 2* takes 40 minutes to install. Forty long, slow and painful minutes as all 8,249 files, using an installer from the Dark Ages, are slowly dumped on your PC. Good start...

We are are a little confused, however. A quick glance at the US developer's website (www.battlefront.com) has the game listed as *Combat Mission: Barbarossa To Berlin*. The website even describes it as 'successor to the award-winning game system pioneered in *Combat Mission:*

Beyond Overlord.' But in the UK it is being touted as *Combat Mission 2* – and it's somewhat unclear as to which one is right. The game has certainly had a serious make-over graphically and sound effects are much improved. But the game is still essentially *Combat Mission 1*, albeit much prettier. To us, a sequel should be radically improved from its predecessor (just look at the difference between *Panzer General II* and *Panzer General 3D*). *Combat Mission 2* still has many of the same problems that dogged *Combat Mission 1* – installer from hell, slow AI and so on.

QUICK STEPPE

But enough of the bitching, what's the game actually like? Simple, it's the same as *Combat Mission* – except this time it's Nazis versus Russkies. After Hitler decided to 'make Poland a little bit smaller' he started eyeing up Russia, and in August 1941, 3,000 tanks, three million troops and industrial quantities of sausage in sour cabbage sauce rolled across the border – Operation Barbarossa had begun.

Combat Mission 2 has you slogging it out on the Russian Steppes, these missions proving to be an extremely

"It's the same as *Combat Mission* – except this time it's Nazis versus Russkies"

well-balanced affair. The Soviet tanks could go toe to toe with almost all the German armour (later in the war). However, it wasn't until the battle at Kursk in 1942 (Operation Citadel) that things started to go Russia's way. And you'll find

playing Citadel in *Combat Mission 2* challenging.

Graphically the game has been tidied up since its original incarnation. Rather than weird bubbles, you now get proper explosions and smoke. Machine-gun fire no longer resembles a scene from *Star Wars* and AI is fairly competent although it does take a rather long time to 'think'.

FOXTROT OSCAR

But, while the game is more polished, there are still chunks missing. There is no campaign mode, where you take a band of raw recruits and turn them into veritable killing machines. There are no upgrades or weapon selection: you take what you're given. Sure you can generate your own battle, but that requires a great deal of effort – some flexibility in the pre-made battles would have been a welcome addition.

Gripes aside, *Combat Mission 2* is a fun follow-up to *Combat Mission* – although it's more of an update than a sequel. As a turn-based game, it ain't half bad, but to be honest, calling it *Combat Mission 1.5* would have been nearer the mark.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Very in-depth
✔ Months, not hours, of gameplay
✘ Installation from hell
✘ Feels like an add-on, not a sequel
✘ Interface still rather clumsy

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Polished game, deceptive marketing

THE GLADIATORS: GALACTIC CIRCUS GAMES

■ £29.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Arxel Tribe | ETA: November 30
thegladiators.arxeltribe.com

REQUIRES PII 300,128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card
DESIRES Pentium 4 1.1GHz, 192Mb RAM and a 32Mb T&L 3D card

Russell Crowe wasn't free to review this frantic RTS, so we got _Keith Pullin_ to do it

YEP, it's true: _The Gladiators_ has nothing to do with a certain bad-tempered Australian actor maiming Romans and wild animals in a ring. Sadly, it also has no connection whatsoever with queue-jumping outside Ulrika Jonsson's hotel room. So, with the two best ideas out the window, the question is just what the hell could _The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games_ be all about?

Well, with a hint of _Smash TV_ (remember that?), a large dose of _Z: Steel Soldiers_ and a healthy portion of _Cannon Fodder_, the gameplay for this steroid-pumped parade is pure guts and glory. Sure, there's subtle strategy involved (more on that later) but essentially this is a game to relieve tension.
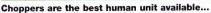
Plot-wise _The Gladiators_ owes a lot to _Buck Rogers In The 25th Century_ and _The Running Man_. From a retro-kitsch perspective this is great – but connoisseurs of taste beware –

Major Callahan admires his massed ranks before they get pulverised into small pieces.

Choppers are the best human unit available...

But the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

INPERSPECTIVE

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS
Reviewed Issue 101, Score 90%
Though very similar, The Bitmap Brothers' sci-fi blaster offers a little more in the way of building options and also gives you the chance to carry units through from one battle to the next.

BATTLE REALMS
Reviewed Issue 111, Score 86%
Now available for a mere tenner, this is the game to go for if you like swords and sorcery over hi-tech weaponry. It also places far more emphasis on battlefield tactics and individual unit strengths and weaknesses than _The Gladiators_.

the tackiness is almost overwhelming. For example: a man investigates a black hole, is captured by aliens and must earn his freedom by winning a series of gladiatorial-type tests in a massive galactic arena. It's hardly inspired, but like most things French, developer Arxel Tribe manages to inject its muscle-bound specimen with plenty of charm.

YOU RING MY BELL

At first you can only play as humans, or to be more precise as Greg D Callahan, an ex-Marine. Complete the human scenario (we say scenario – it's actually seven battles on seven different landscapes fought in an arena) and you move on to a further two scenarios, this time from the perspective of the two featured alien races. Each battle takes place in a packed arena full of thousands of bloodthirsty aliens. Every time there's a serious bit of action in the ring, a thunderous roar erupts urging the competitors on to even greater acts of violence.

To lend an even more fevered edge to the game, the destruction is described with the help of an enthusiastic commentary courtesy of the alien version of John Motson. Admittedly this punditry only appears at key points during the 'show' and is not actually real-time, but still, it evokes a tangible atmosphere and gives the game that distinct _Running Man_ vibe. If you've got a GeForce 4 graphics card, the atmosphere is increased with the use of some great water and dust effects. But that's not to say the graphics are bad for the rest of us, even if the camera does have problems settling into position...

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Despite the fact that _The Gladiators_ offers a variety of units for you to control and most levels require you to capture 'spawn zones' so that you can create even more, it is still a bit of a no-brainer when it comes to tactics. However there are certain gameplay quirks that need to be sussed.

Firstly, terrain and cover is extremely important. Climb onto roofs, shimmy up lookout towers and hide in bunkers. Do anything and everything you possibly can to gain a height advantage or protect your troops. Fact is, this game is difficult, and if you're caught out in the open by a bunch of aliens with six-foot-long scimitars it's gonna hurt.

Secondly, destroy all the scenery you possibly can. Incinerate trees and bushes that aliens might be hiding in (and believe us they do like hiding in them) and blast through walls. Every piece of the landscape
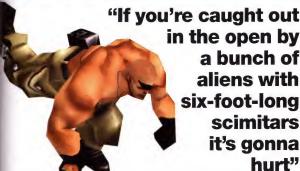
"Will keep you mesmerised until the last limb has decomposed on the battlefield"

YOU WANT SOME?

FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO PARTY

In the version we reviewed, the only multiplayer game available was over a LAN. At the time of writing, Arxel Tribe has *not* set up servers for an Internet game, however, a spokesman from the company declared that such an option is likely to be available in the future via some kind of patch. Our guess is this is still likely to be dependent on how well the game initially does in the shops. So, when you buy it, make sure all of your friends do as well, so that enough copies shift to warrant a server being set up.

Cross bridges with extreme caution.

Blow up the two towers for devastating results.

You'll have to pick a thicker bush than that to hide in...

> "If you're caught out in the open by a bunch of aliens with six-foot-long scimitars it's gonna hurt"

WALKTHROUGH →

FUN DAY OUT
Thinking of taking your kids to the circus? Think again. You may scar them for life...

1 In the beginning it's just you against the galaxy – a tough assignment for the lone Mr Callahan. But he's ready for anything.

2 Luckily help is at hand. By walking into power-ups, cloned warriors appear to offer our stranded hero safety in numbers.

3 The main thing now is to quickly find some cover. Fighting in the open is quite simply a recipe for disaster. So don't hang about.

4 With the initial skirmishes out of the way, you need to work your way towards a spawn zone where even more units can be created.

5 By picking up 'jokers' you earn bonus points that allow you to buy more units. And believe me, you're going to need all the help you can get.

6 Look out too for extra bonuses such as increased firepower and first aid kits. Collect plenty of these and you should be on your way to victory.

can be wiped out – and there's usually good reason to do so.

Finally, rush attacks don't work. Bazooka boys always need to stay just behind the infantry and your commandos are great at scouting ahead and then luring foes into an ambush. Larger units such as tanks pack a much larger punch than the ground-based troops but you won't actually get to use them until later in the game. The key is to use each unit separately and to its strengths and only then can you play *The Gladiators* without becoming so infuriated you want to chop your own hands off.

GALLIC GRIT

The Gladiators is a great game with only a few negative points, but much as we try and imagine it being successful, we can't. The main problem is that it falls between two categories; it's neither a fully blown RTS game nor a full-on action game. This was a problem that befell both *Battle Realms* and *Z: Steel Soldiers* and sales suffered because of it. Ultimately, the same is likely to happen here.

On a brighter note, the game is well worth buying, providing an excellent mix of entertainment and action. Like many a French creative entity before it, there's a certain *je ne sais quoi* about *The Gladiators* which keeps you mesmerised until the very last limb has decomposed on the battlefield. There's no doubt about it, when it comes to gladiators, this one is even meaner than the infamous Mr Crowe. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Superb atmosphere
✔ Great commentary and cut-scenes
✔ Very challenging
✔ You can destroy everything in your path
✘ No Internet multiplayer
✘ Camera is a bit twitchy at times

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The circus comes to town

STEEL BEASTS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Just Flight | Dev: Strategy First | ETA: Out Now | www.esimgames.com

REQUIRES P266, 32Mb RAM and a 2Mb graphics card **DESIRES** Yup, that'll do

Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear oh dear.
Paul Presley goes to war and promptly wishes he hadn't

THERE'S no polite way of putting this so here goes. *Steel Beasts* is the reason pretty women, when they find out you enjoy playing computer games, would rather not spend any time with you in a social environment.

It might as well be called 'Nerd Combat' or 'Geek-O-Fun 3000'. Tank warfare isn't exactly the sexiest of subjects at the best of times, especially when it's presented in a modern gaming arena using an engine that seems to have been developed in 1983, has graphics that haven't heard of 3D acceleration or D3D drivers, and approaches the whole concept of user friendliness as it would the concept of cow masturbation or bathing in goat's piss.

FLASHPOINT FODDER

There hasn't been a half decent dedicated tank sim on the PC since, well, I don't know, *M1 Tank Platoon* probably. I stress the word dedicated there because you do get to drive tanks in the total warfare sim that is *Operation Flashpoint* and the bottom line in all this is that although *Steel Beasts* has all sorts of claims towards authenticity, truth is, it's just hiding amateurish coding skills and gameplay design behind the veneer of hardcore wargaming.

Its supposed selling-point is its open-ended architecture that allows you to make missions and swap them with your friends at will. Once again *Steel Beasts* falls way behind the likes of *Flashpoint* here, which also allows you to do the same thing with far greater levels of design control and enjoyment.

ALL WRONG

But it isn't just the dated engine at work here. There are basic flaws in the game mechanics that have you throwing your hands in the air like you really, really, really don't care. Why do your forces still use green camouflage paint when you're in the desert? Why, when sat behind the gun, do you have a tank commander who can happily tell you who to shoot at and where to point the gun, but when you hop into the control seat you're not given the ability to do the same? Why go to all the trouble of including a screen that shows an interior panel of your tank if you then admit in the manual that it serves absolutely no use in the game? And why, oh why oh why oh why, do the tanks float?

I could go on but I'm not going to. The box cover contains all sorts of awards from the likes of major US PC gaming magazines as well as plenty of PC simulation dedicated websites. 'Best Simulation Of The Year' they all seem to scream, which just goes to show you can't trust anything you read in print these days. Except for this of course: There is no excuse for *Steel Beasts* in this day and age. Buy *Operation Flashpoint* instead. [PCZ]

INPERSPECTIVE

OPERATION FLASHPOINT
Reviewed Issue 104, Score 90%
Every time you buy *Operation Flashpoint* an angel gets its wings. Every time you buy *Steel Beasts*, said angel is stripped of its clothing and beaten with its harp.
RUNNING AROUND YOUR BACKYARD WITH AN OLD BIT OF PIPE
Reviewed Issue: N\A, Score: N\A
Actually far more realistic than *Steel Beasts* and a lot more fun, although it'll make you dizzy after a while.

This almost makes it look decent.

> **"Why do your forces still use green camouflage paint when you're in the desert?"**

A truly beastly experience.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Small box won't take up room on your shelf
✔ Will work on any PC built in the last decade
✗ It's crap
✗ It's shit
✗ It's arse

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Make the bad thing stop, mummy

You'd think you were there, wouldn't you?

It's not just tanks. The APCs are awful too.

5:36

WWE RAW

■ £19.99 | Pub: Anchor | Dev: THQ | ETA: November 8 | www.anchorinc.co.jp

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64Mb RAM (128Mb for Windows 2000 and XP) and a 16Mb 3D card (not Voodoo)
DESIRES P4 1Ghz, 128Mb RAM (256Mb for Windows 2000 and XP), a GeForce 3 graphics card and a decent gamepad

Finally, the WWE has come to the PC. *Martin Korda* dons his tights. So no change there then

I HAVE to admit, I've never had sex with my sister. Neither have I ever had sex with my mum, auntie or my next-door neighbour's pet dog. I don't drive a pick-up truck. My name isn't Cletus. I don't spend my days drinking Boilermakers with 'mah burdies' down at Smokin' Joe's, and shooting cans off tree-stumps with 'mah pa's shotgurn'. I don't go home each day to my mobile home and toothless wife (who's also my first cousin) and throw out my eight in-bred children (Mary-Ellen, Cletus Junior, Ern, Vern, Pee-Wee, Brad, Chad and Maybell) so that I can dry-hump the gummy bint. I don't possess a mullet, let alone a curly blond one which hangs rigidly down my neck like a cluster of crusty pubes. None of the above describe me or my life. I am, however, a pro wrestling fan.

STEREOTYPES AND MEN IN TIGHTS

A bunch of incestuous rednecks. Either that, or kids. That's us wrestling fans. Apparently. With stereotypes like that, it's hardly surprising most people won't admit to liking the violent soap opera that is the WWE. Does that include you? Does it? Come on, it's only you and me here, no one will know if it does. It does? Excellent. HEY EVERYONE, WE'VE GOT A PRO-WRESTLING FAN OVER HERE, HA HA HA HA! Only joking.

So, WWE RAW then. Any good? Well surprisingly, yes, actually. Wanna make something of it? What initially appears to be little more than a random button-pummelling no-brainer, soon reveals itself to be a pretty competent beat-'em-up.

INPERSPECTIVE

ONI
Reviewed Issue 100, Score 70%
An action-adventure with plenty of arcade-like combat.

THE NOMAD SOUL
Reviewed Issue 83, Score 87%
An excellent sci-fi action-adventure, with limited, but entertaining combat which complements a superb storyline and shooting sequences.

MAKING THEIR WAY INTO THE RING

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE HYPE.

THE ROCK
While many Americans consider him a western hero, questions must be asked about his political agenda. The People's Champ's finishing move is the People's Elbow and his trademark facial expression is called the People's Eyebrow. See what I'm getting at comrades? The irony is that while millions of capitalist fat kids adore him, no one seems to have noticed The Rock is in fact, an unashamed Pinko.

THE UNDERTAKER
The bad arse off the WWE. Whether that means he's got a stinking crevice or whether he's the meanest man in the business, I'll leave to your imagination. He has beaten everyone, including himself. No kidding. At least that's what we were supposed to believe, only his body double was about four inches shorter, 30 kilos lighter and of a different skin tone. Apart from that, though, they were identical.

KANE
Who is this mysterious masked monster? Does anyone know? Well, yes, actually, we do. Having previously wrestled unsuccessfully under the name Dr Isaac Yankem, an evil dentist (great gimmick guys), the ginger giant returned several years later as the masked man-mountain Kane. Incredibly, he also transformed overnight into The Undertaker's brother. Interesting gene pool.

STONE COLD STEVE AUSTIN
Currently suspended for throwing his rattle out of his pram when he didn't like his storyline, Stone Cold is popularly believed to be the hero of the working classes. Rude to his boss and anti-authoritarian, he's an example to us all. So Dave Woods, you'd better start showing me some respect or I'll rip out your spinal column and play it like a glockenspiel. Please?

In fact, I'd go so far as to say that it's the best beat-'em-up the PC has ever seen. And I should know. I've played some turds so big you'd get your whole forearm dirty trying to pick out all the peanuts.

Not that that is immediately apparent mind you. Ooooooh nooooo. First you have to wade through a bog of console-styled menu screens which scream 'Shit Conversion' louder than a baying rugby crowd at a club-footed kicker. Assaulted by the mire of wacky beeps and whizzes which accompany each selection, you'll be cringing in your Y-fronts at the apparent craaayyyyzeeeeness of it all. The match selections, single, tag, tornado tag, handicap, triple threat, fatal four-way, king of the ring and lesbo slap-up (all of the above just with females), however, are far from limited, as is the excellent wrestler editor which allows you to create your own monstrosity to fight for your cause in the squared circle.

EDIT THIS

The editor actually proved a massive hit in the office, so much so that closet wrestling guru Anthony 'Hollywood Hulk' Holden spent half a day gleefully perfecting a grappler more hideous-looking than something you'd find manning a check-out at a 24-hour service station, its head like an over-inflated basketball sporting a moustache lifted straight from a Greek paedophile's jawline. You can see my creation (strangely idolised in the office to the point

of cult status), in the Here's One I Made Up Earlier panel. How we laughed.

However, facial hilarity aside, the editor is an excellent tool for creating a near-endless variety of wrestlers, meaning everyone can be catered for, whether you're black, white, gay or straight. The sheer depth and attention to detail makes it a joy to try out your new creations, and you'll soon find yourself dispensing with the dated list of 35 WWE superstars (well over a year out of date and missing many new stars) and opting for your configured creations instead.

ULTIMATE FIGHTING ENGINE

However, it's once the action kicks off that things really start to happen. Ring entrances are explosive, with each wrestler's strut to the ring recreated with spod-like attention to detail. Pyrotechnics pop, lights flash, music blares, people cheer and videos roll on the big arena screen, concocting a charged atmosphere of pure adrenaline-charged hype before the impending action. You can even rush your opponent as they enter the ring and pummel them with a variety of weapons, too. Which is nice.

The actual bouts are sheer en-tert-ain-ment. Victory requires you to not only beat seven shades of poo-poo out of your opponent, but to win the crowd over and make sure you don't spend all your energy in the process. The beauty of this three-pronged victory meter means you really have to put some thought into what you're doing. Repeat the same move over and over and the crowd will get bored of you. Fail to

pace yourself, and you'll be beaten in minutes. The excellent fight engine, lifted from the award winning Dreamcast title *Ultimate Fighting Championship*, works like a wet dream you simply can't wake from (OK, that might be taking it a bit far, but you get the idea). That's if your machine is up to it, otherwise you'll be watching in horror as the combatants jerk like epileptic whores across your screen.

The Can-Can Championship soon degenerated into a massacre.

> ## "I'd go so far as to say that this is the best beat-'em-up the PC has ever seen"

Kick him in the knads, he'll enjoy it.

HERE'S ONE I MADE UP EARLIER

CREATE YOUR OWN SUPERSTAR'S APPEARANCE, ENTRANCE AND WRESTLING STYLE WITH RAW'S SUPERB WRESTLER EDITOR. THEN, MAKE UP THE REST

1970
With the Cold War still at its height, the US begins experimenting with genetic inter-species mutation in order to create the ultimate soldier. The project is abandoned and all-new species terminated, after a psychologically unstable panda/badger crossbreed tears the heads of three scientists. However, one species, the Man-Chicken escapes, but is never found.

1998
After countless tales about circus freak shows featuring an amazing egg-laying man, a nine-foot stick-legged behemoth called 'The Chicken' debuts in the WWE against floppy-haired Japanese midget Funaki. His brutal but athletic performance wins him plaudits earning him the nickname 'The Rabid Hen'. His amazing ability to get out of submission holds wins him the title The Chicken Escapologist.

1999
Controversy courts The Chicken when it's revealed he lays an egg in his tights before he goes into the ring. Claiming the unsightly bulge is actually a nappy, necessitated by an incontinence problem, the furore soon dies down. Meanwhile allegations in the press that The Chicken lives in a box and eats his meals off a conveyer belt are vehemently denied. US special agents monitor the situation.

2000
The most conclusive proof yet that The Chicken may be just that. Accidentally referring to the ring as The Coop in an interview, The Rabid Hen attempts to fly during his Heavyweight Title bout with Stone Cold Steve Austin. The attempt ends in failure but gives birth to a stunning finishing move, the Chicken-Kicken. After his failed title bid, The Chicken falls down the pecking order before being sidelined with an injury.

2002
Claims the heavyweight title from Stone Cold, nailing him with a now perfected Chicken-Kicken to pick up the win. Is stripped of the title when DNA tests show him to be corn-pecker. Meanwhile, *PC ZONE* reviews editor Martin Korda is admitted to Butplug Mental Hospital after deluding himself with make-believe stories about a man-bird wrestler. A Government cover-up is suspected, but denied.

The WWE is an Equal Opportunities Employer

Heterosexual, apparently.

Come on ladies, this is supposed to be a family show.

Each wrestler has all their trademark moves accurately replicated, while fighting styles and tactics depend on their size and speed. They're each blessed with a finishing move, which, when pulled off (by no means easy), is supremely satisfying. Don't get too buried in the role though, as you'll do yourself a mischief climbing on the Chesterfield in mock celebration of your achievements. Remember, we're gamers, not athletes.

Mastering RAW takes a long time. Every move can be countered, but timing and knowledge of key combinations is essential if you want any chance of pulling this off. Learn the moves and you'll soon be embroiled in 20-minute epics, as matches see-saw back and forth, with countless near-falls raising pulses to critical levels, and wrestlers staggering from exhaustion as they try to raise themselves for one last push towards victory.

NEGATIVE BIT
Of course, there are plenty of 'buts' as well. GeForce 4 cards can cause ridiculous motion blur which spoil the action somewhat, while the clipping leaves a great deal to be desired. AI has the occasional suspect moment and wrestler collision detection is tenuous during some of the more acrobatic moments. But we're talking *fun* here, and if you have the machine to do it justice, and the patience to learn the fight engine's subtleties, then that's exactly what you'll be getting, and all for a measly £19.99 to boot. In fact, it's thanks to the low price that *WWE RAW* has scored as well as it has.

It may not be the next big thing in PC gaming, and it may be firmly entrenched in its console roots (*RAW* has already shipped on the Xbox), but it's supremely entertaining, especially when played with friends – the deceptively deep combat engine appearing to suit the PC even more than its console counterpart. Best of all, though, you won't have to change your name to Cletus to enjoy it, which I know will come as a huge relief to you all. **PCZ**

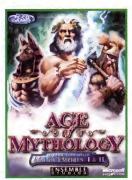> ## "It may not be the next big thing in PC gaming, but it's supremely entertaining"

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

WHAT'S THE POINT OF IT ALL?
While you can compete for every WWE title belt, through a series of ever-harder encounters, *RAW* lacks a campaign option, where you form alliances and feud with various wrestlers as you bid for superstardom. Although the bouts are always entertaining, ultimately, there seems little point to it all once you've captured the desired title.

PCZONE VERDICT
✓ Superb TV style presentation
✓ Excellent wrestler editor
✓ Solid and involving fight engine
✓ Cheap
✗ Old wrestler list
✗ Poor clipping and collision detection

80
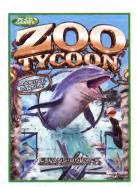
Pure entertainment at a bargain price

Graphically, *K. Hawk* is several years behind the times.

K.HAWK: SURVIVAL INSTINCT

■ £29.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: Similis Software |
ETA: Nov 15 | www.k-hawk.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card
DESIRES P4 1Ghz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin **instinctively knows this action/adventure bird won't stay the night**

> "You can sprint between two guards and disappear into the jungle without so much as a graze"

Enemies are tough to kill, but are such bad shots you won't have to worry about them too much.

TALK ABOUT a poor man's *Metal Gear Solid*. I actually fell asleep three times in one afternoon playing *K. Hawk*, which is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it beat my previous record of falling asleep twice while playing a game (*PGA 2000* in the early hours of the morning last summer). And secondly, I had more fun asleep than I did while conscious –

unusual, especially when there's a bird involved.

K.Hawk: Survival Instinct is simply tedious. Graphically it's a shadow of Konami's seminal infiltrator, in fact the visual glamour of this 3D aberration lies somewhere between the original *Tomb Raider* and *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine*. It's not just the model textures or backgrounds that sully the feel either; the stiff animation makes our Navy S.E.A.L heroine look like her hands are handcuffed together when she runs. *K.Hawk* is basically about four years behind current 3D technology, which is actually

impressive when compared to its gameplay which is probably on a par with *Pong* – hold on, what am I saying? It's nowhere near that good.

MOUNTAIN OF PROBLEMS

The action is so bland and the enemy soldiers' line of sight so poor, you literally have to stand nose to nose with them before they even register your existence. They are also appalling shots; you can sprint between two guards and disappear into the jungle without so much as a graze.

What does cause problems though is the way each enemy agent needs about four straight headshots before they die. With the added problem of extremely well-hidden

ammunition for your guns, it's safe to say that there's no easy killing spree. Your time is mostly spent exploring the undergrowth, or if you venture further into the game, shuffling around nervously behind barrels and crates looking for ammo and medi-paks.
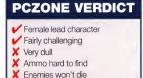
DAZED AND CONFUSED

Those who get to the later stages of the game may also discover some of the most tenuous and confusing missions ever devised. Our eponymous hero will occasionally try to make things more obvious by saying things like: "Oh – that mountain over there looks interesting…" But it doesn't really do much for the game. Wandering from one side of a secret base to another, monotonously switching machinery on and off in the vain hope of making a lift move is clearly not why one becomes a S.E.A.L.

So, *K.Hawk*? What are we going to do with you? Well, if this game was to join the US Navy it'd have a tough time. Firstly it would need a serious haircut; you gotta look good to be a S.E.A.L. Secondly it would need a change of attitude, as right now, its attitude sucks. There's only one place this hawk's going, and that's down. **PCZ**

UNITED STATES NAVY
IDENTIFICATION CARD
NAME: KITTY HAWK
RANK: LIEUTENANT
SEX: FEMALE
DATE OF BIRTH: 11/14/1974
HAIR: BLOND
ID: 958 324 765

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Female lead character
✔ Fairly challenging
✘ Very dull
✘ Ammo hard to find
✘ Enemies won't die
✘ Looks awful

42
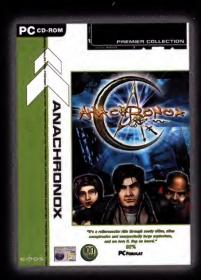
The sleepiest action game ever

EARTH 2150: LOST SOULS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: Reality Pump |
ETA: October 11 | www.zuxxez.com

REQUIRES P200, 32Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

The *Earth 2150* real-time strategy saga rolls on. *Steve O'Hagan* jumps on for the ride

IN 2150, Earth is a grim old place indeed. The planet has been knocked out of orbit and is on a collision course with the sun. The only people left are the remnants of three factions fighting over the resources necessary for evacuation.

If you have visited this bleak future in either of the previous games, *Earth 2150* and *The Moon Project*, then you'll know to expect an involved, technically excellent RTS with a number of interesting innovations, albeit wrapped up in slightly laborious gameplay.

The map and units in *Lost Souls* are rendered in 3D with an elegant and intuitive camera system. It's a good-looking piece of work, even though superficially

dips. Buildings and vehicles turn lights on when darkness settles, rain and snow fall convincingly, and aerial units climb and bank as they pass hills and mountains.

BASE TO BASE
Common with the other two games is the way your home base interrelates with the bases you set up for each mission. Resources will often have to be sent from your mission base via airlifters, and units that you evacuate from each map back to HQ take their experience bonuses with them.

The elaborate technology tree lets you research everything from weapons to varying vehicle chassis types and scanner systems, and then custom

multiplayer mode makes for good value for money for newcomers. But for anyone who has played either of the earlier titles, don't bother unless you found yourself gagging for more when the credits rolled on *The Moon Project*. Dazzling in its day, but we're beginning to expect more from strategy games. PCZ

Not bad, but we expect more from our RTSs.

"The baffling array of options makes this one for the more committed RTS fan"

it hardly differs from its predecessors. Its main downfall is the limited draw distance, leading to slight disorientation and a difficulty in keeping tabs on the bigger picture.

This aside, *Lost Souls* ties its gameplay to the environment in an impressive fashion. Day turns to night mid-mission with shadows cast from units and buildings lengthening as the sun

design units before ordering your factories to produce them. These flexible research tree and inter-base management dynamics provide plenty of meat for the more technical player, but have a serious impact on pick-up-and-playability. Granted, no one expects an RTS to be playable without at least a cursory peek at the manual, but the baffling array of options here makes *Lost Souls* one for the more committed RTS fan.

FIGHT THE SYSTEM
The other side effect of the highly involved research and build mechanic is that you're always conscious you're battling the system rather than the enemy. You feel it's much less about your combat strategy than your economic planning abilities. Can you regulate the flow of supplies between your home base and the front? Can you counter the AI's ceaseless assaults with your defensive structure building?

The three linked campaigns, a skirmish generator as well as the

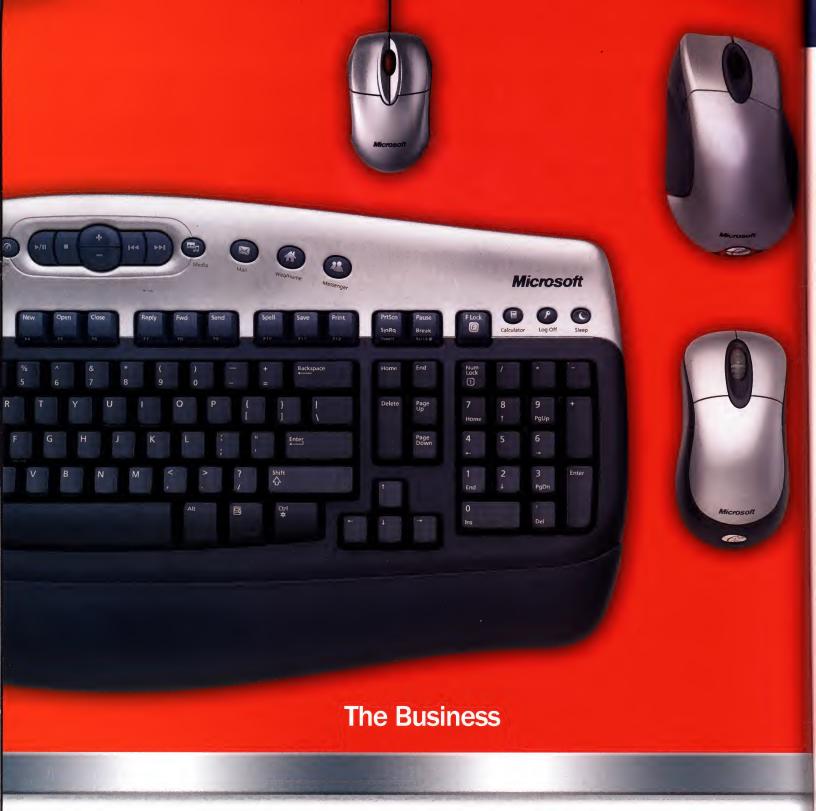Some of the earth-shattering explosions look the business.

The voice-overs have been dire all through the series, and *Lost Souls* doesn't disappoint on this front.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Solid 3D engine
✔ A good range of research and build options
✔ Interesting base interrelation
✘ Lack of draw distance
✘ Very similar to its predecessors
✘ Off-putting learning curve for newcomers

70

Highly intricate, though ageing RTS

The Business

Give yourself the ultimate in competitive advantage, comfort and style with Microsoft® Wireless desktops and Optical mice. Get everything you've always wanted with a keyboard and mouse in one package with the Microsoft® Wireless Optical Desktop. Put the Microsoft® Wireless IntelliMouse® Explorer through its paces and experience unprecedented performance, accuracy, control and a clutter free desktop. And for when you're on the move, take the mouse into unchartered territory with the new Microsoft® Notebook Optical – the last word in comfort, style and mobility. The Wireless Optical Desktop offers a sleek dark finish with titanium accents and one-touch buttons that allow immediate access to the internet, email and multimedia activities*. And all Microsoft mice equipped with advanced optical technology let you Point, Click, Roll and Scroll with superior accuracy and maximum comfort on practically any surface. Distinctive and sophisticated – with so much advanced technology at your fingertips it's no surprise that we call them THE BUSINESS.

www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware/desktop

Microsoft Wireless Optical Desktop

Wireless IntelliMouse Explorer

Notebook Optical Mouse

The Microsoft® Advantage
HARDWARE • SOFTWARE • COMPATIBILITY

Microsoft®

The terrain is lush and packed with detail.

Mounds of the slain litter the battlefield.

Smoke obscures the view as battleships trade salvos.

COSSACKS: BACK TO WAR

■ £19.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | ETA: 18 October | www.gsc-game.com

REQUIRES Pentium II 233, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** Pentium III 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Hold your horses, says *Steve O'Hagan*. All 8,000 of them

THE FIRST thing you notice when playing *Cossacks: Back To War* is that it doesn't have much to do with fearsome, vodka-swilling horsemen of the Russian Steppes. Instead, you find yourself in possession of a sprawling RTS set between the 16th and 18th centuries, featuring titanic clashes between the great nations of Europe and beyond.

For those new to it all, the *Cossacks* games are to the RTS genre what *War And Peace* is to literature – epic, with a cast of thousands and made in Russia. Well, Ukraine. Up to 8,000 units can populate any of the often vast maps, and while frigates and Men-O-War trade salvoes on the ocean waves, cavalry and infantry charge through volleys of grapeshot on the land in impressively staged fights.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Back at your lovingly constructed city, an intricate economy has to be looked after, with resources gathered, troops fed and armed, and marketplaces built to ensure a healthy flow of trade.

While this is the second expansion pack for *Cossacks: European Wars*, it is packaged as a stand-alone game. You get all the gameplay tweaks from the first expansion, *The Art Of War*, together with a bunch of all-new missions, nationalities, units and features. All this is yours for the reasonable ask of £20.

Switzerland and Hungary are the new countries in question, and each sports unique cavalry and infantry units and a distinct architectural style. There are 100 new maps to try your hand at, and the new terrain styles are supplemented by a user mod pack that contains a further 30 units.

RISKY BUSINESS

None of which should distract from the fact that this is fundamentally the same micromanagement-heavy game released last March. It's a daunting game to pick up, with a baffling array of build options and unit functions making it about as welcome a gift to the casual gamer as a hurriedly-wrapped pig's excreta. And despite the developer's claims to have improved it, the AI still leaves a lot to be desired, committing such ills as telling formations of cavalry to stay put while distant artillery slowly decimates them. And, in single-player at least, victorious strategies usually revolve around building the right type of buildings and troops, rather than movements on the battlefield.

Pounded by cannon fire, the computer player's cavalry elect to just stand in a big square. That's poor AI that is.

"*Cossacks* games are to the RTS genre what *War And Peace* is to literature – epic"

SHINE ON

The visuals still look pretty good. You can practically see the buttons gleaming on tunics and the action flows smoothly. The additions to the online game are impressive, and include a rating system, the more diplomatic and economic-oriented Peace Time mode (in which the onus is on out-building your opponents rather than out-fighting them), and the ability to forge alliances with CPU controlled sides.

Overall, it's not bad value, and points to CDV for making it a stand-alone product. But, despite its impressive unit count and appealing setting, *Cossacks: Back To War* still lacks elegance and isn't quite up to scratch. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Huge unit count
✔ Pleasing visual detail
✔ Impressive new multiplayer features
✘ Reliant on micromanagement
✘ Same old AI annoyances
✘ Ageing game mechanics

75

Solid, if ageing RTS at a budget price

BIG SCALE RACING

■ £19.99 | Pub: HD Interactive | Dev: Bumblebeast | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Steve Hill prefers his own remote control to radio-controlled car ones

Remote controls are for televisions, not cars.

Nice motor, but the legroom's murder.

Don't tread on me...

EVERYONE needs a hobby. Some people watch football, some collect stamps, and others race 1/5 scale radio-controlled cars in Holland. It's the latter that we're concerned with here, as *Big Scale Racing* simulates the 'sport' that's sweeping the Netherlands, and, apparently, the world.

Creating a simulation of a simulation is always a bit of an odd thing to do. It's like releasing a Subbuteo game, offering two degrees of separation from the real thing. Nevertheless, that's what they've done here, and though it might look like just another car game, the handling is vaguely how you'd imagine a

big toy car to react. Obviously, to really replicate the remote control aspect, you'd have to drive your car from a fixed position, and you can actually do this, the only drawback being that it makes the game unplayable.

Essentially, *BSR* is a fairly straightforward racing game, albeit with cars that are more

likely to flip out of shape than their actual-sized counterparts, making contact a risky tactic. It isn't actually quite as bad as you'd expect, and as a representation of the niche activity, it's probably unrivalled. However, considering you can pick up *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* for a fiver, there's no real

reason to buy it. The press release claims it is definitely not recommended for the faint-hearted. We'd stick with definitely not recommended.

PCZONE VERDICT 45
Small cars, little fun

FRONTLINE ATTACK: WAR OVER EUROPE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos Interactive | Dev: In-Images | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES P4 1GHz, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb graphics card

Keith Pullin gets tanked up for some WWII RTS action

Doing business the Russian way...

Allied forces spend a morning shopping in Rome.

Nice graphics, shame about the AI.

FRONTLINE Attack: *War Over Europe* is very nearly everything you could possibly want in a WWII RTS. Graphically it's polished; the presentation is good; the background music and sound effects are atmospheric and you can choose to play as Germans, Russians or Allies.

Unfortunately, like a lot of other RTS games, *Frontline*

Attack's problem lies with its control interface and AI. There are times when your units simply do not want to be selected; you can left-click them until your forefinger blisters – fact is, some units just don't do orders. Whereas others just don't understand them.

Indecisive Nazis march back and forth trying to figure out

best place to stand, while mighty Panzer tanks weave across the landscape in a vain attempt to avoid squishing them.

Working out terrain elevation and positioning your army accordingly is also tricky. In fact, you can't really decipher the lie of the land until you zoom in so close to the landscape you can't see your units anyway.

To counteract this you have to zoom back out again to locate your errant army and hope they're still there.

Frontline Attack is frustrating – but it's not a total disaster. The multiple objective missions are well designed and there are plenty of historically accurate edu-gaming moments to savour. There's also a level editor and

multiplayer skirmish to mess around with – so there's no shortage of depth. Feel free to give this a shot if you're into your wargames, but don't expect *Sudden Strike* or *Commandos 2*.

PCZONE VERDICT 60
Tanks, but no tanks

PINK PANTHER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Wanadoo | ETA: Out Now

THERE IS a saying that goes something like, 'If we don't pay attention to the present, history is doomed to repeat itself, usually for the worse'. A lesson, it seems, never learned in gaming, where history repeats itself more often than a glass of sprout wine. And so we get anomalies like *Pink Panther* games crawling out of the past to inflict cheap family fun on the market.

It belongs in that 16-bit era of dull 2D licensed platformers. It may be in that pseudo-3D kind of style of days gone by, but to be honest, it might as well not have bothered, allowing you to only move in straight lines. It's also a game that the average person could complete in less than a day given the small amount of levels and repetitive tasks to complete. However, as with every game of this ilk, the younger you are, the more you're likely to enjoy the experience of playing it.One for the kids then, eh? *(JL)*

PCZONE VERDICT `43`
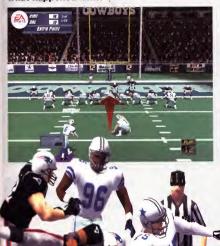

It's the rinky-dink panther.

Decent animations but that's about it.

MADDEN NFL 2003

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | ETA: Out Now
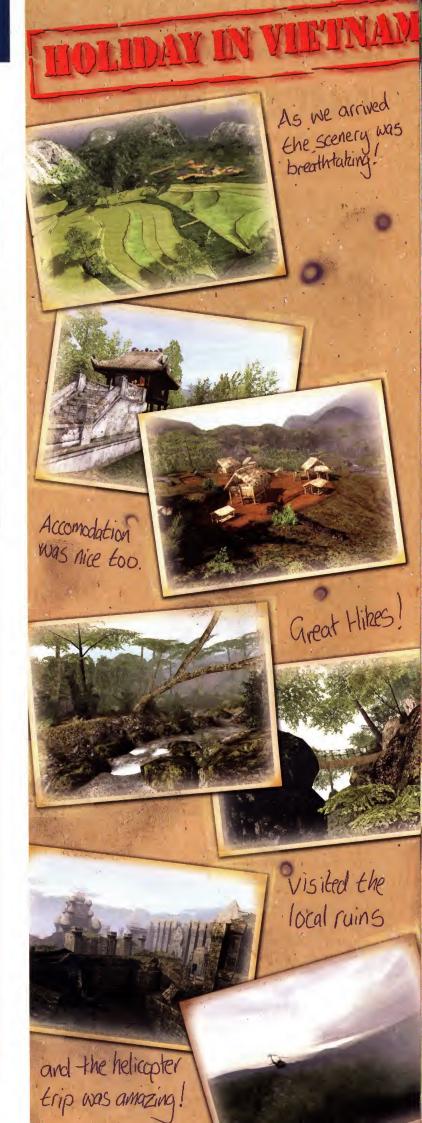

What happened next?

YES, WE know it's not proper football, but EA still insists on releasing its annual helmet 'em up to a largely disinterested European market. We'd like to tell you what's different this year, but to be honest, apart from some new tunes and a few tweaks to the interface and control system, little else has significantly changed. What's the same is the impossibly glossy presentation, superb graphics, and sporadically enjoyable gameplay.

Fortunately, the tactics can be left to the 'Ask Madden' option, and it is quite possible for two pasty English white boys to achieve something approaching a competitive match. Pulling off a set play when on the offence is undeniably exciting; floundering around like a blind man while attempting to defend is less so. However, for most, tactics will remain a pretty random affair, which is to the game's detriment. Extremely nice cheerleaders, though. *(SH)*

PCZONE VERDICT `68`

As we arrived the scenery was breathtaking!

Accomodation was nice too.

Great Hikes!

Visited the local ruins

and the helicopter trip was amazing!

GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Red Storm | ETA: November 15

REQUIRES PII 450, 128 Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

REQUIRES ORIGINAL TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON

Mark Hill plays soldiers in the second expansion pack to Ubi Soft's hit

The most important button after 'fire' is 'quicksave'.

"Oh no, now my feet are all wet."

The eight missions are incredibly challenging.

GAMES WITH the Tom Clancy stamp always guarantee realistic action in fictional but believable scenarios, but this expansion pack veers dangerously close to fantasy. In the year 2009, Castro has gone to the big communist cigar in the sky, Cuba is having its first proper elections in yonks and the Americans are free to parade about waving the flag for democracy. Yeah, right.

After the unexpected brilliance of the first add-on pack, *Desert Siege* (which, unlike any other expansion, actually improved on the original), *Island Thunder* has a lot to live up to. In many ways though, it represents a step backwards. Yes, there's the usual tweaks and improvements, such as slight graphical adjustments, the introduction of short cut-scenes showing you being dropped off by chopper or boat and a few new multiplayer modes, but none of it is that noticeable.

While *Desert Siege*'s wide-open levels in the baking sun transformed the game into something different, *Island Thunder* is much closer to the original, with forests and swamps providing the setting for the predictable base infiltration and rescue-the-downed-airmen missions. And, although the AI has been improved (enemies retreat and use cover, while your team mates behave less erratically), it's the Cubans' unnatural and frustrating accuracy that drives the difficulty levels even higher. It was a problem in the past, but this time they seem to have homing bullets. It's still an excellent game, and the tension is undiminished, but *Island Thunder* seems an unnecessary addition to the series.

PCZONE VERDICT 82

Still great, but let's stop here, OK?

4

Mindless destruction has never been so much fun.

BALLERBURG

■ £19.99 | Pub: HD Interactive | Dev: Ascaron |
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 500, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 64Mb card

If an Englishman's home is his castle, *Steve O'Hagan*'s house has just been reduced to rubble

REMEMBER that classic Atari arcade game, *Ramparts*? No? Well, you and two others sat in your castles and then proceeded to pound one another into submission with as many cannons as you could lay your hands on. In between salvos of artillery, you rebuilt your ruined walls as best you could.

Imagine that, crossed with porcine 3D *Worms* rip-off, *Hogs Of War* and you get something approaching *Ballerburg*.

As with *Ramparts*, you and a number of opponents sit in your 3D-rendered castles while subjecting each other to bombardment with your arsenal of siege weapons. However, now you have the chance to build workshops and laboratories to upgrade your firepower, and can also harness the power of wizardry to further harangue your opponents with lightning strikes and fire-dousing rainstorms.

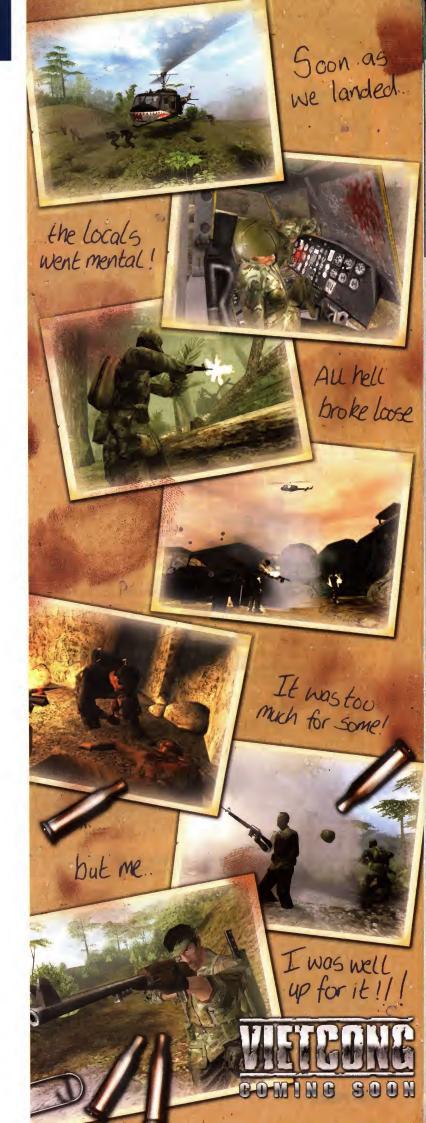Everything happens in real time, and most of your time is spent waiting for cannons to reload, making minute adjustments to their trajectories and then watching as your projectiles rain down on the enemy's keep. Catapults, cannons, flaming catapults, primitive mortars – all can be developed and put to good use.

It's a simple game, hardly original and of limited scope. But certainly in multiplayer, it can be an absolute blast. The thrills are unsophisticated and rely on you taking pleasure in sheer destruction, rather like a child throwing stones at a neighbour's window, but frankly, when did that stop being fun? The only thing is, despite the flashy 3D visuals, it's the kind of game you'd expect to download for a fiver. Twenty quid? Leave it out. Wait for it to go to Budget, then grab it.

PCZONE VERDICT **69**

Unadulterated but overpriced fun

REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough...
especially round Christmas time

BEST BUY ★

Although *Steel Soldiers* lacks the epic combat of many RTS games, the balance of units is spot on.

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

"TIME SHALL not weary them," Churchill once said of soldiers of the fleshy variety, though he could so easily have been prophesising the fate of The Bitmap Brother's rust-resistant warriors. Despite being on store shelves for 18 months, *Z: Steel Soldiers*, a belated budget release if ever there was one, remains remarkably fresh and unique, especially when compared to the strategy titles that have graced the shops since its release.

Though the mechanics behind *Steel Soldiers* will be familiar to anyone who's played a real-time strategy game, the stripped down, fast-paced gameplay is so far removed from anything else it bears little comparison. Rather than collect resources, *Steel Soldiers* simply requires you to capture territory. The more lands that are under your control, the more credits you accumulate. It's a simple formula, complemented by the fact that the two opposing sides have access to the same hardware, lending the game a pace that makes *C&C* look positively lethargic by comparison.

Graphically the game has lost little of its charm, in part thanks to the humour of the cut-scenes, but also due to the fact that the in-game visuals always had a function beyond that of purely looking good. If there is one aspect of gameplay that won't see much action it's the multiplayer game, which failed to make any impact, despite its speedy qualities.

It remains one of the great injustices that *Z: Steel Soldiers* was an unqualified flop upon release. If you missed it first time round and if you have only a passing interest in strategy games, ensure the same fate doesn't befall the game this time around. For a paltry five quid, you have no excuse.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT 87

The AI still holds up remarkably well.

Manic first-person shooter action at its best.

SERIOUS SAM: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Take 2 | ETA: Out Now

GET YER games 'alf price. 'Alf price games, get 'em 'ere. Just £9.99. Wait a minute. £9.99? Half price? That's a bit rare isn't it? Especially with a game this good. But it's true, *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter*, released at a mere £19.99 less than a year ago, is now available for ten measly quid. Count 'em, ten.

As first-person shooters go, this is about as basic, and mindlessly entertaining as you can get. Which is no bad thing if you're into incinerating endless waves of enemies with a variety of heavy-duty and zany weaponry, while being subjected to mildly amusing one-liners from a Jess Ventura sound-a-like.

The sheer number of enemies on screen at any one time is little short of breathtaking, although the mono-rail action soon starts to pale against the cinematic splendour of *Medal Of Honor*, *AvP2* or *No One Lives Forever 2*.

If you're after a daily half-hour adrenaline shot of relentless mayhem, *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* is unparalleled. However, don't expect anything too clever, or even to have to think, as this is reaction shooting at its very best, and most literal.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT 82

Castle building has never been so much fun.

STRONGHOLD

■ £9.99 | Pub: Take 2 | ETA: Out Now

THE FIRST *Stronghold* game combined microeconomics with a childish love of Lego, and building your own medieval stone erections. The beautifully detailed depictions of castle life where bakers bake bread, armourers fashion suits of armour and hunters prowl the countryside for fresh game, captured many a strategy fan's heart and has been continued in the second incarnation of the game *Stronghold Crusader* (Issue 122, 82%).

The gameplay is divided up between building your own castle, establishing a strong economy to feed your people and an even stronger military force to defend them, while besieging a few enemy castles along the way. The single-player military campaign focuses on gradually conquering the British Isles and facing down four computer AI foes: the Rat, the Pig, the Snake and the Wolf, who each have their own unique attack styles.

Although the concept and execution is hardly original, what *Stronghold* still has going for it is its wide variety of units and lots of quirky details such as torture devices, boiling oil pots and even a castle ghost. With so many bog standard RTS games out there, *Stronghold*'s greatest gifts to the RTS community are decent solid gameplay and an unashamed sense of fun.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT 84

STARLANCER

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

They don't make them like this anymore. When I was a boy... blah, blah, blah...

THEY'RE A rare breed. Space combat games that is. Gone are the glory days of the *Wing Commander* series, when every developer was jumping onto the bandwagon, trawling out clichéd plots about aliens attacking earth, in a feeble attempt to emulate its success.

Now if memory serves, the last truly great space combat sim (the trading-based *Edge Of Chaos* aside), was... this one. And considering many of the crew from the starship *Wing Commander* were involved with its development, it will hardly come as a surprise that it's a cracker.

Based in the far off future, *Starlancer* refreshingly moves away from the standard humans vs invaders plot and focuses on two warring human factions

battling each other for supremacy of the solar system. The action is arcade-based frenetic mayhem, which is complemented by a finely crafted story that expands via in-game cut-scenes and some breathtaking FMVs. Better still, you can play through the single-player campaign with a mate via a LAN connection.

If you made the mistake of not playing this two years ago when it first arrived, then get yourself down the shops now. For a mere five notes, you'll be hard-pressed to find better value for your money this Christmas.

Martin Korda

| PCZONE VERDICT | **83** |

TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX:
ROGUE SPEAR – BLACK THORN

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

With *Ghost Recon* out and about and *Raven Shield* getting closer, this is best left on the memory shelf.

IT MIGHT have only been released this year, but *Black Thorn* is yet another add-on for the very old *Rogue Spear*. It's a standalone expansion, so you won't need the original game – also re-released this month – but it's still afflicted with the same flaws: dismal AI, poor presentation and paper cut-out graphics. If you've been playing anything made in the last two years the shocking visuals might actually knock you off your chair. Having said that, once you're engrossed in a mission you'll be too tense and concentrating too hard to pay any attention to that. And inching your way across corridors and figuring out the

best way to clear a room of terrorists will still have you on the edge of your seat.

Black Thorn's plot is a bit more interesting than the usual *Rainbow Six* fare, and involves a terrorist group re-enacting famous terrorist acts from the past century. Well, we say famous, but it's unlikely you'll ever have heard of any of these plots, making the whole thing superfluous. In the end, only old *Rainbow* players in search of a nostalgia trip should bother.

Mark Hill

| PCZONE VERDICT | **68** |

Five quid!? Bargain.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

YOU wouldn't want to be trapped in a lift with him, but there's no denying that Codemasters' long-term alliance with the speedy Caledonian has reaped massive dividends. With development of the third incarnation at an advanced stage, this budget release offers a timely opportunity for cheapskates to see what all the fuss is about.

We rated this highly when it first came out, and the passing of time has done little to erode our opinion. Striking a near perfect balance between authentic rally shenanigans and frantic arcade action, *Colin McRae 2.0* offers the most fluid driving experience available on the PC.

The key is in the handling, which is never sloppy and requires you to keep your wits about you at all times. Split seconds can make the difference between success and failure, and it can be a breathless affair as you attempt to squeeze that little bit extra out of both the car and yourself.

Throw in immaculate attention to detail and stunning scenery and you have all the accessories required for what is still the benchmark rally game. At this price, there is no reason not to own it. Unless you don't like rally games.

Steve Hill

| PCZONE VERDICT | **85** |

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

Stop showing off, you're not impressing anyone.

WE WENT a bit mad for the original *Motocross Madness* back in the day, the new fangled 3D accelerated graphics masking what was in reality little more than a solid arcade game. This second (and presumably final) incarnation suffered somewhat from sequilitis, offering essentially a more gimmicky version of its predecessor. As well as contending with your opponents, ambient trains, planes and automobiles were thrown into the mix, offering even more opportunities to skid around on your arse in a mildly frustrating manner.

Not shy of options, game modes include both outdoor and indoor racing, baja, enduro, and of course the obligatory

stunt section, whereby you launch your rider a 100 feet in the air and press random buttons like a chimpanzee. The career mode offers a combination of all of them, enabling you to progress from rank amateur in a T-shirt and jeans to a handsomely paid champion.

Ultimately though, the racing suffers from being too fast and the handling too fiddly. Too much time is spent being tossed around like a rag doll, and to be honest it takes a fairly concerted effort to finish anywhere but last. That said, there's probably a fiver's worth of fun to be had.

Steve Hill

| PCZONE VERDICT | **68** |

Dug-a-dug-a-dug-a-dug-a-dug.

ROWAN'S BATTLE OF BRITAIN

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

ROWAN has always produced interesting sims, and *Battle Of Britain* is no exception. As well as letting you fly fighters (and Stukas), you get to man bomber gun positions, or manage the whole battle in campaign mode.

The planes are very detailed and they both look and feel the part – the flight models seem just about right, with plenty of twitching and shaking as you zip around, while the graphics are good without being outstanding. One thing the graphics do very well though, is fill the sky with planes, and diving down into massed formations of Heinkels is realistic and scary.

The campaign is excellent, with a great user interface and the ability to jump into the cockpit of any of your planes at any time. Playing as an RAF Fighter Controller means you have to vector your squadrons to incoming Luftwaffe raids, keeping track of factors like squadron morale and aircraft losses, while playing on the German side means achieving your objectives to a tight deadline.

BoB is an original, engrossing sim, and Rowan's decision to release the source code means it's still being improved (See *BoB* Developers Group at www.3d-raumplan.com/Flightsim). It's well worth a tenner.

Dave Mathieson

PCZONE VERDICT 87

TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX:
ROGUE SPEAR – PLATINUM

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

THIS section of the magazine is often devoted to wincing in pain at the undignified aging of games best left as pleasant memories, and *Rogue Spear* is no different. As ugly, cardboardy and ropey-looking a shooter as you could

hope to play, the three years since its original release have done *Rogue Spear* no favours whatsoever. But then the *Rainbow Six* series was never about flashy graphics (something the new title *Raven Shield* will be addressing). It was always about hard as nails tactical planning, extremely tense rescue missions and instant death as soon as you're seen by a terrorist. It also remains one of the most popular team-based shooter ever created. This platinum pack also contains the juicy *Urban Operations* expansion, so you're getting plenty of gameplay for your tenner. Of course, it's unlikely that you'll use it for the main reason it was created, which was to add more multiplayer maps and options. But if you can get past poor visuals, the non-existent AI and the rather archaic interface (planning stages included), you'll find a piece of gaming history.

Mark Hill

Forget the graphics and interface, there's a damn good game underneath.

PCZONE VERDICT 67

SILENT HUNTER II

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

THERE WAS once a time when everyone owned a combat simulation of one sort or another, whether it was a realistic reproduction of a stealth fighter, or an entire re-enactment of some fictitious Cold War encounter beneath the ocean waves. Today of course things are very different. Most people would prefer to blow holes in people that are six feet away rather than six thousand and they'd rather not have to extend their flaps or blow their ballast tanks to do so either.

Well, that's what we thought until within the space of a few weeks not one but two sub simulations surfaced after what seemed a decade of underwater inactivity – one set during WWII, the other in more modern times. *Silent Hunter 2* was of course the one with the WWII setting (as opposed to *Sub Command* which controversially allowed players to launch nukes at Afghanistan), which can be linked to a copy of *Destroyer Command* for some naval catfish and mouse action. As a simulation it is a fairly accurate portrayal of submarine warfare, not quite as

"Cap'n, I cannae get no more power. The warp core is gonnae blow."

hardcore as *Sub Command*, but certainly more atmospheric and tense. Despite the fact the game hasn't been out for long, the graphics are unlikely to blow anyone out of the water, but with little else available in this rapidly sinking sub-genre, fans shouldn't have any problems overlooking such things.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT 69

LEFTOVERS

▲ **PLEASE SIR CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?**

Like a stack of festering turkey, shunned by revellers already gorged on the delights of superior fare, this month's leftovers lack the mouth-watering properties of the previous courses on these pages. But tenuous culinary comparisons aside, what we have here is a collection, which you'd mainly be better off avoiding this Christmas, rather than buying. Unless you hate the person you're buying for, in which case, they're the perfect Christmas gifts.

Settlers IV (£9.99, Focus Multimedia) is the pick of the bunch, its cutesy graphics, offsetting a deep and rewarding strategic brain-teaser (76 per cent). From Interactive Ideas, at a hefty £12.99, are the ancient (they both run comfortably on a Pentium 266) *The Three Stooges* and *Defender Of The Crown*. The first claims to be witty, yet the funniest thing about this arcade-puzzler is the claim on the box that the graphics and animation are eye-popping. Hello, this is 2002, not 1982, (40 per cent). *DOTC*, although equally archaic, is still eminently playable to this day, its mixture of strategy and action sequences mixing well enough to entertain for an afternoon or two, (52 per cent).

Myst III: Exile (£9.99, Focus Multimedia), is a slow-paced static-screened adventure for the casual gamer (60 per cent), and *Conflict Zone* (same price, same publisher), is an ambitious but flawed RTS, which takes the onus off the player and often seems to play itself (60 per cent).

Finally, from Xplosiv, both at a mere £4.99, are the entertaining but shallow arcade-influenced flight sim *Crimson Skies* (62 per cent), and the ugly, dated, but fairly accurate golf sim *Links LS Classic* (66 per cent).
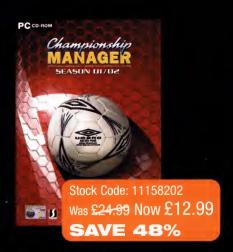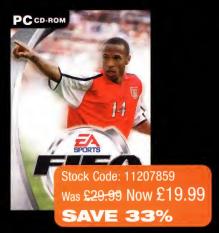
Martin Korda

Settlers IV

Myst III: Exile

Conflict Zone

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

BATTLEFIELD 1942 v1.1

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Digital Illusions | ETA: Out Now | www.battlefield1942.com | Players 2-32

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128Mb RAM, a 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card and ISDN/Broadband for 32-player games

The single-player missions were a sequence of catastrophic military blunders but *Richie Shoemaker* hasn't given up just yet. This time he's going in and he's not alone

MULTIPLAYER

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

IT IS rarely the case these days that when buying a first-person action game you can have your cake and eat it. Whereas this used to be true – you'd buy a game and spend a couple of weeks completing the single-player game, then spend the next six months getting your money's worth playing it online – today it's more usual to invest in two separate games. There are exceptions of course, but even in the case of *Half-Life*, it was only when *Team Fortress Classic* and *Counter-Strike* were released that it could boast a multiplayer game to match its solo campaign. Look at *Medal Of Honor* and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, one excelling offline, the other a massive success on. Even the next round of shooters like *Unreal II* and *Doom III* will focus primarily on appealing to the one rather than the many.

It would perhaps be a little unfair then to pass judgement on *Battlefield 1942* simply on the basis that it's a single-player game, as the original review score was based on a combination of the multiplayer and single-player games (which despite the valiant attempt to prove otherwise), is little more than a series of training missions

If you bail out, don't forget to wear a parachute.

for the multiplayer. It's great to be able to play across virtually every major battlefield of WWII – driving tanks, sitting behind the big guns of a battleship, strafing a column of advancing troops from the sky or simply crawling through the grass on your belly. But the fact is that until a

significant update is undertaken, *Battlefield 1942* isn't worth buying unless you intend to play against other people.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Online, however, *Battlefield 1942* is almost a completely different experience, and it's exclusively

thanks to the fact that your human allies and enemies don't tend to have perfect accuracy behind a trigger. They also don't have a pathological desire to drive around in circles or through impassable doorways when behind the wheel.

A great little motor this, only there's not much room for shopping.

You can drive or pilot any vehicle in the game.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY ◎

COMMAND AND CONQUER

Although *Battlefield 1942* features a number of easily accessible 'radio' commands enabling you to, among many others, warn your team-mates of an impending air attack, the game would benefit greatly by having some sort of command structure whereby players would rise through a persistent series of ranks. High-ranking players would be able to give orders, while those lower down would have to follow them on pain of court martial or be sent on some sort of spud-peeling mission. With a lack of properly co-ordinated attacks in many games, such a system would perhaps keep many people in line.

Of course there are some utterly stupid players out there, and it can be hit and miss finding a decent game. Some players even seem content to take up valuable slots and waste their time fooling around with heavy machinery when they should be doing their practising against bots. But when you do find a bunch of like-minded people who are willing and able to play the game the way it's meant to be played, you really won't find a better online gaming experience.

TICKETS PLEASE

Aside from the way in which people conduct themselves, the multiplayer game plays out in identical fashion to the single-player. The 16 maps set across each WWII theatre – from the D-Day landings at Omaha Beach to the final days among the rubble of Berlin – are identical down to the last tree and sand dune, with tanks, jeeps, APCs, aircraft and ships available to hop into in the same places as you would expect. Climb aboard an APC and your human driver will at least head off in roughly the right direction, and even those left to journey on foot will happily follow behind to support your advance.

However, objectives may differ depending on the server. The Conquest mode charges you with capturing vital control points. You can also play Capture The Flag and Co-operative games as well. Co-op unfortunately isn't that hot, as vacant slots are taken up by AI goons. CTF on the other hand is quite a laugh, since rather than trying to steadily make an advance, you simply have to make it to the flagpole at the enemy base and bring home the cloth to score a point. Control points are still central in CTF games however, since the ticket system still applies as it does in Conquest games (the more control points there are under your side's control, the quicker your enemy loses tickets used to buy reinforcements). However, unlike Conquest games, it is possible for a side with rapidly dwindling reserves to steal a point by racing in and out of the enemy base in a jeep.

MO' DEM DOWN

Singling out choice maps is considerably difficult since they are all of a high quality. Certainly the most popular are the Pacific maps like Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and the Wake Island level from the multiplayer demo, as they feature all types of vehicles. Maps focused around urban combat (Stalingrad, Berlin) also seem popular, while desert maps co-starring British and Germans are lower down in the pecking order. Despite their almost universal high quality *BF1942* would certainly benefit from some smaller, more focused locales for eight-player games or less.

If you are unfortunate enough to be lumbered with a

Artillery is useless in the single-player game. Online it can be devastating.

56K modem, you should find that you can still play games with up to 16 players, without too much lag but it's rarely the case that you will get a decent game. The maps are so large and the methods available to travel across them so varied, that despite what it says on the box, a humble analogue modem just can't handle the job. Unless you have a high-speed digital or broadband connection, I'm afraid you might as well not have a modem at all for all the good it will do, and unless you're prepared to set up a dedicated server, even hosting a game through your phat pipe can be problematic.

CRUSHING VICTORY

Thankfully there are plenty of servers available to join. Even if you do have to settle for one sparsely populated with players, it usually isn't long before all the spaces are filled and you can get on with the task at hand with a full complement of men on both sides.

There's a massive amount of fun to be had playing *Battlefield 1942* and on many occasions you'll find it hard not to laugh out loud, whether it's launching a rocket into the cockpit of an enemy pilot taxiing for takeoff,

"*Battlefield 1942* isn't worth buying unless you intend to play against other people"

or, as happened to me, inadvertently driving a tank off a cliff, only to crush a squad of Japanese soldiers, who are alighting from a landing craft, hoping to pull off a sneaky attack. If you've got the hardware, I suggest you go and find out for yourself. That's an order, soldier. **PCZ**

One of the few British vehicles in the game, most are American.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 121)	78
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	**91**

The most fun I've had online since *Counter-Strike*

SID MEIER'S SIM GOLF V1.03

■ £34.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Firaxis | ETA: Out Now | simgolf.ea.com

REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** Any PIII, 128Mb and a 16Mb 3D card

Knocking the gophers on the head for a second time is *Keith Pullin*

PATCHED

WHEN WE reviewed *Sid Meier's Sim Golf* almost a year ago, the game was full of bugs. We're not talking the odd minor bug either; it was awash with them, so much so that reviewing the game was an extremely difficult task. However, being the hardy golfing troopers that we are, we somehow managed to struggle through the proverbial wind and rain and deliver our verdict – it wasn't great.

Sim Golf may have been novel to start with, but ultimately its lack of variety and intelligent goal-based missions soon got the better of it. As an attempt at the golfing version of *RollerCoaster Tycoon* it fell a long way short.

So, now that the game has finally been patched to (apparently) eradicate the bugs, we thought we'd have another look. Thankfully the news is good. After thorough testing we've come to the following conclusion: as far as we can tell *Sid Meier's Sim Golf* is bug free.

On the issue of whether this improves the game though, the fact is, it doesn't. The actual structure is virtually unchanged; in fact, the only difference we can spot is the axing of the extra close zoom mode (which frankly was too messy anyway) and some cleaning up of the event pop-up windows.

Ultimately this is the same game as the one we reviewed (minus the bugs). However, it's certainly more enjoyable without the glitches, which is why it warrants a slight score increase, albeit a modest one.

Ryder Cup anyone?

At least somebody's taking your course seriously.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 113)	65
PATCHED SCORE	**68**
A gopher free zone	

LASER SQUAD NEMESIS V2.0

■ $25 (£10) six months subscription | Pub: Codo Technologies | Dev: Codo Technologies |
ETA: Out Now | www.lasersquadnemesis.com | Players: 2

PATCHED

ONLINE ONLY

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM, 4Mb 3D card and Internet access **DESIRES** A 16Mb 3D card, ADSL connection and a credit card

Another update for the web's favourite email game. *Richie Shoemaker* goes back to check the doors

New features like fully-visible maps and retreat on sight orders are welcome.

Critically, The Spawn have the ability to reproduce.

IT SAYS something about a game and its legion of fans, when despite the fact it remains unfinished and flawed in a fundamental way, that people play it on a regular basis regardless. In the case of *Laser Squad Nemesis*, it wasn't the fact that a third of the game's combatants (the much vaunted third race) were still AWOL after months of assurances they would soon be joining the field of combat, it was that it took nine months for the developers to fix the bug that didn't allow you to get through doors without blowing them up first. Thing is, no-one minded. Most were having far too much fun to worry about such trivial matters.

With the new update however, not only are the hinges fixed, but the third playable faction, The Spawn (the third race), is in place. And with its lightning fast movement and close-combat abilities, they're bloody enjoyable to play as, providing a perfect foil to the heavy firepower of the ponderous Machina race and the hit-and-run tactics of the Laser Marines. Tweaks have obviously been made to accommodate the new race and while there are perhaps a couple of minor adjustments still to perform, in games where The Spawn are present, there is much greater immediacy and tension.

From rough gem to shining diamond, *LSN*'s transformation has been significant. For value, despite rumours of a price rise, there's not much to match it and with this update (this is our third review in less than a year), what was already an excellent game could be a contender for online game of the year. It's the game email was made for.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 118)	80
PATCHED SCORE	**87**
Email of the species	

INTEL START HYPER-THREADING

Buy one processor and get one 'free' with Intel's brand new 3Ghz CPU

■ **HARD WIRED** Steve Spence

▲ This month, I've been experimenting with the concept of a convergence PC. After the arrival of nForce2 earlier this issue, I wanted see if it was actually possible to build a system which catered for my AV, gaming and general online needs, without having to make any sacrifices – and I was pretty impressed with the results.

You may already know of the wide range of custom aluminium cases on the market – PCs don't have to live in the typical big, noisy, camel-coloured steel cases, as the Shuttle SS51G reviewed on page 131 shows. Once you've addressed the matter of aesthetics and environment, the rest is easy. One nForce2 board with AthlonXP 2700+ and a Personal Cinema kit, all housed in a low-profile, soundproofed 'Home Theatre' case, gave me a system which played games, video and music, as well as delivering TiVo-style control of live telly, to pause, fast forward and rewind whatever I was watching.

The possibilities for such a system are huge, a PC which happily blends in your HiFi and Home Cinema kit could literally replace the need for stacks of CDs and films, thanks to storage and streaming capabilities, and the other aspects of Internet connectivity such as email and gaming will be far superior to any online-capable console.

It's probably going to be a little while before we see purpose-built 'digital convergence' systems appearing on the market, but my tinkering at least means the technology is finally mature enough to realise the concept, and turn us into a nation ▼ of couch potatoes. Hurrah!

Hyper-Threading: are we doing a deal, or are we doing a deal?

"If you're playing a game and your antivirus kicks in, it will run within the second virtual CPU"

INTEL HAS FINALLY announced the world's first 3GHz processor. Based on the Northwood core with the new 533Mhz front side bus that was introduced a couple of months ago, the new CPU is clocked at 3066Mhz, running over 800Mhz quicker than the fastest AthlonXP 2800+ (2.25Ghz). However, with the radical differences in architecture between the two chips, performance is only expected to be within 20 per cent or so with today's games.

Not content with the speed increase though, the boffins at Intel have also made up a new word – Hyper-Threading. This is a new feature that Intel has added to the Pentium 4 core and it's a technology that's been around before, albeit only on to-end Xeon server chips.

DOUBLE TROUBLE
In effect, Hyper-Threading (or HT as it's going to branded on the new processors) allows a single Pentium 4 to act like a dual CPU set-up. Because of the way applications are typically executed, there are loads of processor resources at any one time which aren't being utilised fully and so by adding components, which amount to less than five per cent more onto the processor die, Intel is able to run effectively run two 'virtual' CPUs within the one core.

This doesn't mean an instant 100 per cent performance boost, nor double the effective clockspeed, far from it – the CPU frequency remains unchanged – but it does mean that games that are coded for dual processors will see massive speed increases. At the moment there's not much out there that's ready to take advantage of the new fix (how many of you have got dual-processor PCs?) but now the technology is there it's only a matter of time before games developers start developing for it.

To start with, the best performance gains are going to be in multitasked environments. So, if you're playing a game and your antivirus kicks in, it will run within the second virtual CPU and you won't notice the performance hit that happens at the moment. Similarly, when you're burning a CD you'll still be able to run other applications and in these sort of scenarios you can expect to see anything up to 25 per cent performance increases.

If the initial prices, projected around the £500 mark, don't put you off, then all you'll need to get one of these babies running is one of the new i850E/i845E Intel motherboards and a fresh install of Windows XP and Service Pack 1 – Home or Pro will do, both being 'aware' of the technology.

Of course don't run out just yet for the upgrade as next issue we'll be putting Intel and AMD's latest and greatest toe-to-toe for the mother of all face-offs. And don't think we won't…

ATI ON THE CHEAP

More graphics cards? Well it is Christmas

WHAT DO you do when you've finally knocked NVIDIA off the number one spot, when you know that GeForce 5 is just around the corner? If you're ATI you hit the market with more cards, specifically three additions to its Radeon 9000 family. The three new boards are based on the same DirectX9 architecture as the 9700 Pro GPU, but come with friendlier price tags and specs to match.

First off is the Radeon 9700, little brother to the 9700 Pro GPU and just as feature-packed, with a 256-bit memory interface, eight-pipelines and 128Mb of relatively fast DDR. Where the spec differs is in the clockspeeds, with a 275Mhz core (reduced from 325Mhz on the PRO) and 540Mhz memory clock (620Mhz on the Pro).

Expect to pay around 25 per cent less than the high-end board, with starting prices around £225 or thereabouts.

Two flavours of Radeon 9500 complete the line-up; the Radeon 9500 Pro and the vanilla Radeon 9500. The key difference is the memory interface, which is only 128 bits wide – halving the effective bandwidth available to the GPU. The 9500 Pro (around £175) is again a 128Mb, 8-pipeline card with clockspeeds identical to the Radeon 9700 at 275Mhz and 540Mhz, whereas the bottom Radeon 9500 (look to pay around £155) has half the pipelines, numbering four – and only 64Mb of RAM.

Performance is as yet unknown, but we're hoping to have 9500 Pro silicon and the full skinny for you next issue.

Cheaper Radeons? We like...

PRIC£WATCH

Check the latest price chart and make sure you don't pay over the odds

MEMORY
The price of RAM fluctuates massively, and you can never guarantee whether it's going to go down or up. This month sees PC133 SDRAM drop even further but PC2100 and PC2700 have both risen by almost a tenner to end around the £60 mark.

Price per 256Mb RAM:
- PC133 SDR
- PC2100 DDR
- PC2700 DDR

PROCESSORS: PRICE AND PERCENTAGE DROP

PROCESSORS
After last month's big drops, the bottom end Intels have dropped off the production line leaving you looking at processors of 2Ghz and over. The difference between the two chip giants is now more polarised than ever, with AMD occupying the budget ground and Intel taking the high ground. What do you want? Performance on a shoestring or the added stability that comes with the Intel platform? It's your call.

A7N8X

■ Manufacturer: ASUS | Price: £150 | www.hercules.co.uk

ASUS produces the first nForce2 motherboard – and it's gaming heaven
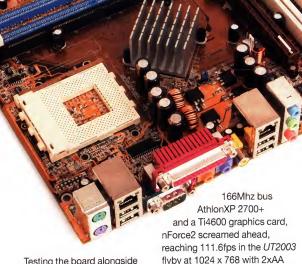
MOTHERBOARD

AS WE'VE reported over the last couple of months, NVIDIA's nForce2 platform has been shaping up nicely. As the first true AGP8x/DDR400 chipset, we've been pretty eager to get our hands on it, and October marks its arrival with the A7N8X from ASUS, the first board to hit retail.

One of the key features of the new platform is its flexibility. Unlike the last generation of nForce boards, NVIDIA are offering a number of chips that allow the manufacturer to tailor the feature set for their clientele. In this case the A7N8X from ASUS is aimed squarely at you, the gamer.

Based on the SPP and MCP-T chips, the A7N8X has an AGP8x/AGPPro slot and supports memory up to DDR400 using NVIDIA's DualDDR memory crossbar. As this

version of the board doesn't include integrated GeForce4MX, the price is quite a bit lower than any of the original nForce bundles, and isn't too far off the KT400 reviewed last month.

It provides dual 400Mbps Firewire, six USB2.0 connectors (two of which are internal), DualNet twin network adaptors (NVIDIA and 3COM respectively) plus the all-singing SoundStorm APU which is capable of encoding your music and games into Dolby 5.1 in real time, and is the first of its kind for integrated sound. It features two ATA-133 controllers, and ASUS has also added a Silicon Image 3112A Serial ATA RAID controller, which allows further storage expansion, plus a little future proofing to your overall investment.

Testing the board alongside our current top performer, the A7V8X, also from ASUS, the nForce2 board was between 10-15 per cent quicker on average. Equipped with a new

166Mhz bus AthlonXP 2700+ and a Ti4600 graphics card, nForce2 screamed ahead, reaching 111.6fps in the *UT2003* flyby at 1024 x 768 with 2xAA while the KT400 scraped 92.1fps with the same components.

Only one month as our Best Performance and the A7V8X from ASUS already finds itself usurped, unsurprisingly by NVIDIA's long-anticipated chipset. In some senses this board is both our Best Performance, and Best Buy this month, but with few of us able to afford (let alone get our hands on) AMD's latest CPUs we'll just leave them with the one accolade.

PCZONE VERDICT | **90**

A great basis for any AMD system

RADEON 9700 ATLANTIS PRO

■ Manufacturer: Sapphire | Price: £290
Phone: 0208 879 6407 | www.sapphiretech.com

An affordable Radeon 9700? Well almost...

GRAPHICS CARD

ATI'S LATEST top-end GPU has been kicking around for a couple of months now, and a wide range of manufacturers are offering cards though most won't give you much change out of £350. This is where the smaller companies come in, like Sapphire, with a cheaper and slightly more board-focused option.

Offering the same eight-pipeline, 128-bit floating point accuracy GPU and AGP8x interface as all 9700 Pro based boards, the features of the Atlantis are no different from any of the competition. From its connectivity, down to the red PCB, the Sapphire board is strictly based on ATI's reference design, with GPU and memories

clocked at 325MHz and 310MHz respectively. Performance-wise, scores are identical to those of the Hercules 3D Prophet 9700 Pro reviewed last issue.

PowerDVD makes an appearance alongside the standard Catalyst drivers CD and ATI Multimedia Center, and although there are no games in the box it does ship with a DVI-VGA dongle for dual monitor set-ups. It also has S-Video and RF cabling to let you hook up your television for DVDs or large-screen gaming.

Right now there may not be a specific need for DirectX9 compliance. However, with the new DX9 API due around the time this magazine hits the shelves, and a couple of pending Christmas titles, anyone considering a serious investment this side of Christmas will have a tough choice coming up.

Choose between ATI's latest chip now, or possibly NV30 – due in a month or so.

This card is £60 cheaper than the 3D Prophet Radeon 9700 Pro, and is therefore our new Best Performance graphics card... for this month at least.

PCZONE VERDICT | **86**

Almost affordable overkill

SHUTTLE SS51G

■ Manufacturer: Shuttle | Price: £252 | www.shuttle.com

Is this the smallest PC in the world?

PC

AS PCS GET faster and more powerful they seem to be getting bigger to boot. At a recent LAN event we saw loads of new systems, most of which were housed in huge server-style cases, whirring and clunking away due to the stacks of fans and drives crammed inside. It doesn't have to be this way.

The SS51G from Shuttle is a 'bare bones' PC which consists of a case, motherboard and power supply, and to make the most of the space nearly everything you'll need is

integrated on the board. This is based on the SIS651 and SIS962L chipsets, which means support for the full range of socket 478 P4s and PC2700 DDR memory. In addition you get 5.1 sound, 100Mbps LAN, Firewire and USB2.0 connectivity. The integrated graphics aren't good enough for games, but there's a spare AGP and PCI slot inside so you can upgrade to whatever you want.

All you need to add to the box to get the party started is a processor, memory, hard drive and CD or DVD-drive, all of which should take you about five

minutes. After installing Windows XP and running the system through our benchmarks we found performance was within 5-10 per cent of the P4S8X motherboard reviewed last month, which is excellent.

It doesn't provide the ultimate system for upgrading, or if you want a variety of hard drives, but for a PC the size of a small shoebox the SS51G is an awesome portable gaming platform and there's an AMD/nForce 2 version in the pipeline soon. Couple it with a

TFT and we reckon you've got the ultimate LAN set-up.

PCZONE VERDICT **88**

One small step for LAN

SILURO GEFORCE4 TI4200 OTES

■ Manufacturer: ABIT | Price: £147 | www.abit.com.tw | Phone: NA

Abit brings the noise with a big, fast and loud 4200

GRAPHICS CARD

THE GEFORCE4 line-up has delivered solid performance across the board but we've been a bit disappointed that manufacturers haven't deviated much from the original reference board – until now. The snappily named Siluro GeForce4 Ti4200 OTES is the product that's causing a stir. OTES stands for 'Outside Thermal Exhaust System' – and it's far from the norm.

It's bigger and heavier than your normal GeForce 4, with a huge cooler consisting mainly of copper, and the entire apparatus is clamped onto the board with an x-shaped piece of metal – which means excellent contact between the surfaces. The cooler consists of a copper plate and heat pipe, and air is sucked into the top of the card through the grey blades of the blower

and forced through the copper fins at the back of the board, cooling the GPU.

The GPU itself is clocked higher than a standard Ti4200 speed of 250Mhz at 275Mhz, and the 64Mb DDR runs at 554Mhz, 54Mhz over the 500Mhz seen on the reference design. Indulging in a little bit of overclocking, which after all is what this board is about, we saw the core and memory both reaching 300Mhz (600Mhz DDR effective on RAM) quite stably. At the supplied speeds the OTES scored anything up to ten per cent higher than the 4200 reference, but still loses out heavily to the
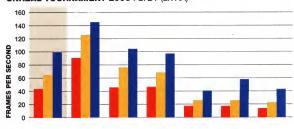
128Mb boards at higher resolutions, as you can see from the graphs.

And there are three major drawbacks. For one, the card is double-height, using two system slots, which means most motherboards will lose a PCI slot with the board installed. Secondly, although the blower might be quieter than some performance coolers out there, it's noticeably louder than the stock offering. More importantly, costing around £150 for the 64Mb version this isn't a particularly cheap 4200, and looking online you can find a 128Mb Ti4400 for a few pounds more. Innovative, but an also-ran already.
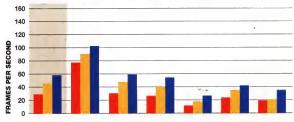
PCZONE VERDICT **71**

Innovative, if a bit on the pricey side

BENCHMARKS

HOW DOES THE LATEST 3D CARD STACK UP TO THE COMPETITION?

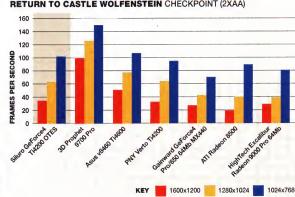**UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003** FLYBY (2X AA)

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 BOTMATCH (2X AA)

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN CHECKPOINT (2XAA)

KEY ■ 1600x1200 ■ 1280x1024 ■ 1024x768

AUDIGY2

SOUNDCARD

■ Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Price: £99.99 inc VAT | Phone: N/A
www.europe.creative.com

What do you do when you've just produced the best gaming soundcard in the world? Go one better...

LAST YEAR there were two really significant hardware releases for gamers, namely GeForce3 (the first consumer graphics part to bring us all the DirectX8 eye candy like pixel shaders) and the Sound Blaster Audigy, the first soundcard in years to represent a big leap forward in gaming audio. One year down the line and Creative is back with a refresh, the Audigy2.

It's the first soundcard to deliver true Dolby Digital EX (6.1 sound) and with the release of the Inspire 6700s this month, Creative has speakers to deliver the newest Dolby consumer standard from day one (see boxout). The number of DVDs offering EX soundtracks is pretty limited, but most games should work straight out of the box thanks to a new version of Creative's 3D CMSS, which generates the extra channels in DirectSound games.

A SLAVE TO YOU

Audigy2 also ups its specs for musicians and audiophiles. The original Audigy boasted both EAX Advanced HD and 24-bit output, which was great for games, but it was limited at 16-bits input, which heavily nerfed its recording capabilities. Audigy2 corrects this and offers a true 24-bit Advanced HD in both its inputs and outputs. On top of the increased fidelity Audigy2 offers a stonking 106dB signal to noise ratio, which means an exceptionally clean, low-noise, sound reproduction, something which was immediately obvious with the subtler sounds in our testing.

Historically one of Creative's few weaknesses has been its software, but the bundle's been improved this time around. There's a new version of Creative's MediaSource, an iTunes-like affair which lets you play, rip and burn your media with a friendly and intuitive interface, and an improved version of the Audio Clean-up tool that removes clicks, pops and other aberrations from dodgy old analogue recordings. You also get two pretty decent games for your cash as well,

with *Hitman 2* and *Soldier Of Fortune 2* included in the box.

OOPS, I DID IT AGAIN

All of which points to the fact that Creative has done it again. The Audigy2 is an excellent upgrade, even for users of the original Audigy, and so it deservedly wins the Best Buy slot from its brethren. But don't take our word for it. Until now, THX Certification has been reserved for home cinema fanatics. Rather than being a sound format or method of digital signal processing (DSP), THX is a seal of approval or watermark which is given to top-notch kit that delivers sound quality of a truly cinematic standard, and at the time of writing, Audigy2 is the only PC soundcard to have earned this accolade. Bring it on.

PCZONE VERDICT 93

Sonic superiority

DVD AUDIO

DITCH YOUR CDS, IT'S TIME FOR HYPER-REAL SURROUND SOUND

Audiophiles have been getting sweaty palms at the thought of SACD (Super Audio Compact Disc), but the new standard met with stiff opposition because of the specialist equipment you'd need to play the discs. The bods went back to the drawing board and have returned with DVD-Audio instead. Boasting up to 24-bit/192Khz in stereo, the new discs offer quality and clarity a million miles beyond

conventional Audio CD and even the newer SACD format.

Audigy2 is the first soundcard that delivers the sonic power needed to deliver the new standard properly. Listening to a few DVD-Audio discs during our tests, the experience across a surround-sound set-up is almost hyper-real, literally surrounding you with the sources, something which isn't possible even if you're at a live gig. It's spooky.

SIXTH SENSE

A 6.1 SOUNDCARD NEEDS 6.1 SPEAKERS. ENTER THE INSPIRE 6700S

The Audigy2 can power a 6.1 set-up and to celebrate, Creative has launched the Inspire 6700s. Similar in looks to the Inspire 5700s, the new speakers have a curved-front centre channel speaker and huge dual-ported subwoofer. They might not be as powerful as the MegaWorks but performance is excellent
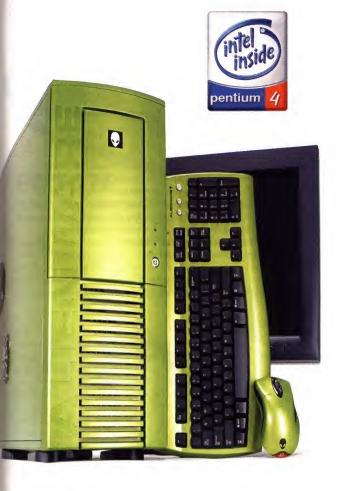
whether you're playing games or watching films. Furthermore, 5.1 users who are considering an upgrade aren't left out either as there's a switch on the back of the sub that will up-mix a 5.1 signal into pseudo 6.1 – admittedly not as good as an original 6.1 signal but as a stepping stone for an upgrade it's a nice touch.

DEAR SANTA...

Not sure what you want for Christmas? Take a look inside *ZONE*'s sack and feel the thrill of inspiration. Everything here comes with our recommendation, and there's something for every day of Christmas

MUVO

■ Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | Price: £99.99 | www.europe.creative.com

MP3 players have become a whole lot smaller but they don't seem to be getting any easier to use, centring around custom cables and bespoke apps just to hook them up.

MuVo from Creative is a new solid-state MP3 player that is genuinely impressive. It's a two-part affair – a grey USB memory stick and a blue housing which holds the battery. Pull them apart, plug the USB into a Windows XP system and you can drag your files into the 64Mb storage, without having to load any drivers. Snap them back together, plug in your headphones and hit 'play'. Simple.

ORANGE NOKIA 7650

■ Manufacturer: Nokia | Phone: 08700 555 777 | Price: £249.99 | www.orange.co.uk

Mobile phones have come a long way since the bricks we used to cart around a couple of years back, and it's set to change again with handsets like the 7650. With a huge colour screen, camera and T68-style joystick, the phone does tons more than just handle your phonebook and calls. It uses a Symbian OS called Series60 with 4Mb of memory into which you can install games and applications to the handset. There's even a ported version of *Doom* kicking around which promises multiplayer fraggage in the future.

QUIETPC SOUNDPROOFING

■ Manufacturer: QuietPC
Price: £45.83 | Phone: 0870 321 4620
www.quietpc.com

Soundproofing as a concept may sound pretty hardcore, but hard drives spinning and GPU fans is bloody annoying. And, although you need to dissect your PC to fit it, the end result is brilliant. Consisting of sheet foam and matting with self-adhesive backing, the material is cut to fit and almost completely mutes your PC. You can't just wrap the entire unit up of course – heat still has to escape, but with coolers like the Zalman and a pack of this, no one will even know you're switched on.

WAVEFINDER

■ Manufacturer: Psion | Phone: N/A | Price: £99.99
www.psion.co.uk

An extremely cool-looking gadget, especially when it's stuck to your wall, Psion's Wavefinder is a digital radio that was was extremely expensive when it was released a couple of years ago. It's a different story now, with units retailing under £100 and hundreds of stations available.

After a new track which isn't floating around on Kazaa? No problems, hook up the Wavefinder and tune into your favourite station. When you hear what you're after hit 'record' and the audio is saved as a CD-quality MP3 direct to your hard drive.

ZALMAN FLOWER COOLER

■ Manufacturer: Zalman
Price: £33.49 (more depending on CPU) | Phone: 0870 321 4620
www.quietpc.com

There's no reason a quick PC has to be noisy, which is why Zalman created the Flower Cooler. The principle is to maximise surface area for passive radiation, and with a low-RPM silent fan it can cool some of the hottest chips out there.

Having put one of these into a windowed case, the Flower Cooler wins on the aesthetic stakes too. There's only one bad point with it – price. Available for both Pentium 4 and AMD systems, a Zalman Flower will set you back anything from £30 to £50 depending on your CPU type and whether you opt for copper or aluminium vanes. But, if you are stealthing up your PC, accept no substitute.

XMS3200

■ Manufacturer: Corsair | Phone: N/A |
Price: 512Mb £150.52 | 256Mb £77.55
www.corsairmicro.com

One of the easiest ways to improve the performance of your PC is to upgrade your memory. Loads of people sacrifice quality and quantity for other components, and overall it can cripple your entire system.

Clocking up to 400Mhz at CAS2, XMS3200 from Corsair is perfect for platforms using nForce2 or for getting a top quality overclock from boards based on chipsets like KT333. With black anodised aluminium ramsinks they won't overheat either, and that's why it's the memory of choice on all our benchmark and testbed PCs. Go get some.

PC TOTE

■ Manufacturer: EverGlide | Phone: N/A |
Price: £10.99 | www.everglide.co.uk

Lugging your PC around is a major pain in the arse. What's the solution? Give the PC-Tote from EverGlide a try. It consists of nylon-style straps with a pair of clips and a tough handle. Strap your tower case inside and you can carry it around like a briefcase. Now all you need is something to tether a monitor with and you're sorted!

IPAQ 3870

■ Manufacturer: Compaq
Phone: 0845 270 4222
Price: £457.07 | www.hp.co.uk

PDAs have moved on so far from the dreary days of word processing it's unbelievable. Units like the 3870 can play MP3s, DIVX movies and games. We're not talking *FreeCell* either, with a conversion of *Tomb Raider* already available for the iPaq and open-source projects like SCUMMVM which lets you play old LucasArts games like *Day Of The Tentacle* whenever, wherever.

FERRARI WHEEL

■ Manufacturer: Thrustmaster | Phone: 020 8665 1881
Price: £99.99 | www.thrustmaster.co.uk

To spend this sort of cash you're going to have to be into your car games in a big way, but if you're going to buy a wheel you might as well get the real deal. Like the name says, this is a replica Ferrari racing wheel and metal-covered pedal set with decent force feedback. Buy this and you'll only have to wait a couple of months before *TOCA Race Driver* hits the shelves.

NOSTROMO N50 SPEEDPAD

■ Manufacturer: Belkin | Phone: N/A
Price: £24.99 | www.belkin.co.uk

You're playing *Counter-Strike* when you accidentally hit the talk key and die a humiliating death saying "wswwdwwwwwww". Sounds familiar? You might want to check out the N50 then. It cuts your options down to ten keyboard-like keys, which are placed directly under your fingertips, along with a d-pad and scroll wheel. All of these can be mapped to emulate keyboard keys or perform macros, and because it emulates the keyboard rather than acting as a game controller it should work with any system. Nifty.

GIGANTA MOUSEMAT

■ Manufacturer: Everglide | Phone: N/A |
Price: £17.99 | www.everglide.co.uk

Balled mice run on pretty much any hard surface, but optical mice are picky and prefer something like the Giganta. Suspended in the hard ABS plastic are thousands of tiny silver particles which make this see-through surface optical-friendly. On top of looking good, the near-impervious surface is excellent for gaming, with very little friction and a nice curve cut for your wrist.

X-ARCADE CONTROLLER

■ Manufacturer: ANP | Price: £99.99
Phone: 020 8453 1830 | www.xgaming.co.uk

A two-player replica of the controls on an arcade cabinet, it plugs into the keyboard connector on your PC and gives you a pretty sturdy stick. With eight buttons each, there's plenty to satisfy even the most ardent *Street Fighter* fan. It's not cheap and we had a few problems getting it working on a couple of the office PCs, but for retro and arcade freaks there ain't nothing else like it.

DEAR WANDY

Spot of bother with your computer? Trouble with your hardware, can't control your software? Write to our resident brain-man for expert PC advice. No job too small

■ **GREASE MONKEY** Phil Wand

GRAND PRICE

Q I'm thinking of getting a new PC for Christmas. I'm 13 and my upper limit is £1,000. What's the best system you can get for under a grand? My ideal specs are the following: 2.0GHz processor, NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti4600, 60Gb hard drive, 19-inch monitor, a cheap soundcard and speakers, a DVD drive and CD burner. I don't know much about motherboards or bus speeds so can you recommend something? Also, if I link to my dad's 1GHz GeForce 2 PC with a 56K modem, will I get the same downloads and lag, as my dad won't let me download in case I get a virus? Finally, is BT planning to update the entire country to ADSL as I really want it!
Stewart Brough

A With £1,000 in your back pocket, you'd think you could buy something with all the right bells and whistles off the shelf – but it's actually quite difficult. Take Sony's VAIO desktop as an example. Now, I happen to think that the RX-based VAIOs are rather lovely, but added to your shopping list they have several shortcomings. To start with, the model with the right toys is going to set you back at least £1,600. Look at their £799 entry-level machine instead and you'll see that it features an 1800+ Athlon processor, 256Mb RAM, a DVD reader and CD writer, not to mention Sony's typically generous software bundle. All very well, but read the specs and you'll see that the motherboard doesn't have an AGP slot, meaning a spanking GeForce 4 is out of the question, and there's no monitor. No good. Click over to www.dell.co.uk and things don't get much better. As with Sony, you'll need to spend at least £1,600 to match your requirements – the conclusion being that you'll need to buy your bits separately. What would I do?

> **"Never ever skimp on the monitor, keyboard or mouse"**

(Image caption)
VAIOs are sexy, but not necessarily what you need.

I'd probably start with something like the £140 Leadtek WinFast TwinForce 2, as it incorporates an NVIDIA nForce415-D based motherboard, GeForce 4 Ti4200, and gives you integrated 10/100 network interface plus sound. Squeeze in a top-ranking AMD Athlon along with some 184-pin DDR memory and hey presto, one computer. As for the rest, never ever skimp on the monitor, keyboard or mouse, and never underestimate what these can do for gaming pleasure. Think about it: you spend the whole time staring at a monitor, stroking a keyboard and holding a mouse. I'd spend £540 on a monster screen – in this case, our Best Buy 22-inch iiyama VM Pro 512 – and opt for a Microsoft optical mouse and Microsoft keyboard. I also happen to like our Best Budget CD writer, the Yammy, so would opt for that over the Plextor. If you're concerned about putting everything together there are plenty of books on how to build your own PC, so set aside a tenner for a trip to Amazon.co.uk.

MOUSETRAP

Q I recently returned home from a long holiday and set my computer up. I plugged my USB Intellimouse Optical in and sat back waiting for Windows to load. As it did so, it went through the process of detecting the USB device. However, instead of detecting my mouse, the dialog box found an 'Unknown Device' and there it sits in my Device Manager with a red cross. I've plugged it into different USB ports, unplugged it, restarted and plugged it in again, cleaned the plug with switch cleaner spray and – well, basically tried everything. I'm running WinMe on a 1.2GHz Athlon – a system on which the mouse has worked perfectly until now. I've uninstalled and reinstalled Intellipoint. I've plugged it into my brother's computer, which is also running an Intellimouse – but it has the same problem. Is my mouse b0rked, or is there something I can do to fix it? If it's b0rked, do I have any sort of warranty from MS?
Benjamin Welby

A As a final test, I'd go to the Device Manager, unplug the mouse, then highlight and remove the 'Unknown Device' entry (in that order). Restart your machine and wait for the Windows desktop to appear. Plug your mouse back in, and wait for the 'Found New Hardware' dialog – follow the prompts and see if you get your Intellimouse back. If not, I'd suggest it's defective (the fact you can swap with the mouse in your brother's PC and get the same error means it's almost certain). Sniffing around the web, I found an article on Microsoft's US website at www.microsoft.com/hardware/mouse/letter.asp explaining that some IntelliMouse Explorer, IntelliMouse Optical or Wheel Mouse Optical products functioned intermittently, or stopped working altogether. As far as I am aware, these products carry a five-year warranty in the UK, and you should thus take steps to get it replaced.

(Image caption)
If you return to your PC and the mouse is upside-down, it's probably just sleeping.

WANDY = DUH

Q I have to disagree with you – PCI is not dead. In your October issue you said: "On the subject of PCI not being dead, I have to say statistics back up your claim. Recent installs of *Half-Life* encourage the user to participate in a

(Image caption)
Oh look Wandy! A TNT2 with an AGP interface!

survey, and the results are online for everyone to see at valve.speakeasy.net/survey. Scroll down and you'll see that the most popular video hardware is the Riva TNT2."

When I did that survey, my card was a Creative Blaster CT6980, which is based on the NVIDIA chipset but is an AGP card, registered as a TNT2/M64. So not all the Riva TNT2-based cards are PCI after all, which is what you seem to be suggesting.
Anonymous

A Guilty as charged: the TNT2 is of course an AGP card. I'd obviously not had my Wandybix that morning.

ECS ALRIGHT

Q I own a PC that a friend built for me from parts bought at a computer fair. It comprises an AMD Duron 650MHz processor, 40Gb hard drive, 128Mb RAM, Hercules 3D

Prophet 4000XT graphics card, and a K7SEM motherboard. I have WinMe installed as the OS. Now, I don't know much about computer performance, just that I want to play games like *Formula 1* and *Soldier Of Fortune 2*. What parts should I upgrade, and what should I upgrade to? I do want the updated machine to last for a good number of years. I'm thinking that I need to swap my mobo and processor, and I have my eye on some cheap RAM. The only problem is that, like most people, I don't want to go spending loads of money. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Ryan Seabury

A ECS, who make your motherboard, claim their product will support all 100MHz AMD CPUs and the majority of 133MHz CPUs. I know of at least one person running an Athlon 1600+ chip on this motherboard without problems, and I've been to the site of at least one US vendor bundling the same product with an Athlon XP 2400+. Plus if you look at the support section of www.ecsusa.com, you'll find a BIOS update that claims it will allow you to run XP 2100+ and 2200+ chips on the hardware you have right now – wow. So if you want my advice, I'd flash your BIOS, spend £90 on a big Athlon (not the new Thoroughbred chips, though, as these won't work with your kit), and see what happens. Although this is painfully unscientific there's no hard and fast rule for compatibility with unknown motherboards and the latest processors, and the only real way of finding out for certain is to introduce them to one another and see what happens. If your PC behaves oddly or locks up, pull the plug and out the K7SEM in favour of our Best Buy MSI K7N420 Pro

An ECS K7SEM is capable of much higher things than a 650MHz Duron.

– or perhaps the Asus A7V266-E (personally speaking, I've always preferred Asus kit). If everything runs smoothly, you just got yourself a two-gig system for under a ton and saved yourself the cost of a new motherboard.

The next step is to update your RAM to 256Mb. Remember that you'll need faster memory to match the faster core of a rinky Athlon, so don't go thinking you can hang on to what you already have. As for video, the Hercules should run neck and neck with a GeForce2 MX in most instances. If I were you, I'd be tempted to keep this card for now and see if the extra thrust from the Athlon won't keep you entertained until past Christmas when you may have a little more dosh to splash on a GeForce4.

FAST TALKER

Q I have a slight problem with the sound on my PC. When I play games, the sound is a little faster than it should normally be, so when a cut-scene appears in a game, the

characters talk faster and in a slightly higher pitch. I've checked this by playing my games on a friend's PC to see if it's a fault with my copy of the game, but they run perfectly well. It's really odd, and it happens again when I play audio files downloaded from the Internet. I have an ATI Radeon VE graphics card running on an Intel Pentium 4 processor. I also get 'blips' in sound when running a video over the Internet. Please help me!

A. Non

A My initial suggestion is the one I make most regularly: check and double-check that your drivers are up to date. Go to the website of the manufacturer of your soundcard – you don't say what it is – and get the latest set. Reboot and see if it's made a difference. Failing that, the only other thing I can offer in this instance is to click Start, then Run, type DXDIAG in the field, and press Enter. This runs Microsoft's DirectX Diagnostic Tool where you can see and modify various settings relating to DirectX. Once the tool has appeared (it may take some time while starting up), click the Sound tab, then lower the level of hardware acceleration using the slider halfway down the page. While I think of it, go back to the System tab and verify the version numbers of the software you're using. If you're not up to version 8, downloads are available from microsoft.com/windows/

directx and also from our cover disc.

PLS TST PNY

Q I read the review of the PNY Verto Ti4200 in the November issue, and have just seen the Ti4600 version on www.dabs.com for £188. The price is a lot lower compared to the other Ti4600s I've seen around. Is there any chance of you testing it to see if it's worth the money?

Anthony Shaw

A To me, PNY will always mean RAM upgrades. They've been in the memory market since the mid-'80s and until recently went under the strapline: 'The memory leader… worldwide'. I've not used their video cards, but I have bought plenty of EDO RAM from them. Their Verto range of graphics hardware, of which the Ti4600 is top banana, has a reputation for solid build, fast pace, but cruddy software. They're also cheap, but don't let that put you off. If you want a GeForce 4 Ti4600, the PNY looks good. **PCZ**

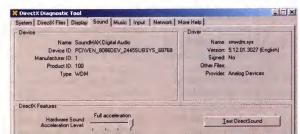*You can visit Wandy at www.dearwandy.com.*

WANDY'S TOP TIP

GET MONGING

The People's Republic of Space Mongolia.

Couple a thirst for games, music and gentlemen's websites to a broadband connection and you'll be touching the sides of your hard drive in no time. With file-sharing programs like KaZaA and LimeWire left to run overnight, those ghastly 'out of space' errors are once again becoming the norm. Before you get excited, no, I don't have a magic way of wedging 50Gb of downloads into 30Gb of Seagate. The only real way to make more room is to buy a bigger drive or trash some of the crap you don't need anymore. Working on the assumption that you're a cheapskate, I'll share a tip that'll help with the latter option. It's called SpaceMonger, downloadable from www.werkema.com. I've had it for a couple of years now and on the odd occasions I use it, it's proved invaluable in tracking down where my space has gone (games, music, you know). Version 2 is due for release soon but will be shareware rather than freeware, so get your skates on and grab version 1.4. What does it do? It generates a graphical representation of your hard drive, allowing you to see with a single glance where your files are taking up the most space. It may sound like a silly boast, but it's quite possibly the most intuitive software tool ever made, requiring no introduction, no explanation, and no manual. You just fire it up and what it does is obvious. It'll even catalogue network drives and removable discs.

The sound tab from Microsoft's DirectX Diagnostic Tool.

WATCHDOG

Cancelled holidays. Upset children. Financial black holes. All the end result of bad customer service. The buck stops here

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

> **"When are you charged £18,226.60 for a laptop you didn't want in the first place?"**

THE ACCUSED

Aztech
TOTAL POWER PERFORMANCE

DELL™

ECLIPSE COMPUTERS

TIME

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

DELL – A DISGRACE

When are you charged £18,226.60 for a laptop worth £2,603.80? That you didn't even want in the first place? When you deal with Dell, according to reader Gary Hume: "Back on August 27 2002, I placed an order for an Inspiron 8200 laptop computer via the Dell website," explains Gary. "We were informed on September 6 that the order had been 'lost' and that a new order would be placed. We declined due to the time it would take for a new order to be raised and built. We assumed that this was the end of the matter."

But things are never that simple. On September 9, Gary's Visa Delta card was debited for £2,603.80 by Dell. He called their sales department on many occasions but with little luck. Finally, an email from Dell on September 17 confirmed the error and the company requested his credit card statement to confirm their withdrawal. But then things managed to actually get worse. While Gary was trying to get that initial money back, six further lots of £2,603.80 were taken from his card by Dell over a period of two weeks – that's a whopping £18,266.60.

According to Gary, Dell promised him that his problems would be sorted out on the Friday before he went on holiday to Canada with his family: "Unfortunately this didn't happen," fumes Gary. "I really had no option but to cancel the holiday as all our spending money had been eaten up by the huge overdraft created by Dell and I had no time to organise substantial funds elsewhere."

At this time, we did ask for an official response from Dell and they eventually came back with the following: "We value the direct relationship with our customers and have resolved the matter directly with Mr Hume. We are confident that the issue will not re-occur and have apologised to Mr Hume for the inconvenience caused."

The Dell Inspiron 8200 – jolly nice but is it really worth £18,266.60?

They continue by saying they have a proven track record with their after-sales service and have received a recent award for it. "However, like all businesses, we do occasionally have issues, as witnessed by Mr Hume's experience," understates a Dell spokesperson. "Clearly, there is always room to improve and our teams work hard to continually refine the way we work to strive for an even better overall experience for our customers."

But has the situation been resolved with Mr Hume though? "I'm angry and offended that Dell claim to have resolved the situation when clearly this is not true," comes back Gary's adamant answer at the time of going to press. "I am still waiting to receive all my money back. After much confusion, £5,400 has finally arrived in my account but the rest is still pending. Dell says they have paid further money into my account but my bank and I can find no trace of this."

He has been told by Dell that they will cover any interest fees generated by the enormous debt and that they will offer him a gesture of goodwill as recompense for his situation. So what does Gary ultimately make of all this? "An apology is not good enough. Their customer service is not good enough.

They have not responded quickly enough. This has been going on for some three weeks – they should have spotted their error(s) within a couple of hours of them occurring – and rectified them immediately. On a daily basis, I have had nothing but insincere apologies, multiple excuses and promises of immediate action from them."

In the meantime, he believes that Dell's intended gesture of goodwill should be for his two daughters: "They lost their first ever holiday abroad and the chance to see their grandparents because of Dell. It was devastating to have to tell my two children that we couldn't go away because we had no money."

We think the very least Dell could do is offer the Humes a free Inspiron 8200. In the meantime, we will update you all on Gary's situation next month...

GUESS WHO

"Probably the first mistake I made was to bother to order the computer from Time in the first place," fumes reader Phil Bloomfield. "I have had to wait more than 40 days for my faulty computer to be delivered back to me. It has been held back in their service centre waiting for a new motherboard since August 8."

He was told the repair would take ten days and says he has suffered at the hands of "numerous breakdowns of communication, especially when they have promised to phone me back and then didn't bother. I was told twice the computer would be delivered within two days and after booking these days off at extremely short notice, I had to phone up and be told that the computer was still waiting for parts. It had never even left the factory!"

So what does Time have to say for itself? "Phillip has now received his PC back and we

have apologised for the delay," they say. "It seems that the delay was due to a stock shortage of the correct components and some poor communication on our part. We will be reviewing our internal procedures to ensure this does not happen again."

Right. In the meantime, as a gesture of goodwill, they have apparently offered you a copy of Worksuite 2002 which you have accepted: "Once again we would like to apologise to Phillip and we hope that his PC will fulfil all his expectations." Good luck, Phil.

DRIVER-LESS

Poor young Tony. His mum goes out and buys Windows XP and in doing so, Tony discovers that his Aztech soundcard will no longer work. He pops along to the Aztech site which says that the company is not making any more drivers for Windows 2000 and above.

Now Tony wants to know why this is the case. Why should he have to upgrade his soundcard when he has a perfectly good one in the first place?

Over to Aztech: "We stopped manufacturing that soundcard about four years ago," offers the company. "The sound chipset supplier no longer provides any updates or support of new Operating Systems, because they closed their audio division."

The company says that as a manufacturer,

Aztech soundcards don't seem to like Win2000 or XP.

"Probably the first mistake I made was to bother to order the computer from Time in the first place"

they depend on the chipset supplier for all driver support. So I'm sorry Tony, they can't help you…

DAZED AND CONFUSED

Reader Phillip Yockney recently bought an ATI Radeon 8500le for £70.44 from Eclipse Computers. But when he got it home he noticed some anomalies with the speed and memory of the card, which weren't consistent with what he knew about the workings of the ATI Radeon 8500le. After digging around, Phillip discovered the card he'd bought from Eclipse was really a Power Colour card, clocked lower. "I was angry because I was under the impression that I was getting an ATI Radeon 8500le clocked at the ATI standard," he says.

According to Phillip, when you shop online, all other e-tailers state who boxed the card. Because of this, he automatically assumed his card was an ATI one because Eclipse mentioned no other company in the promo blurb.
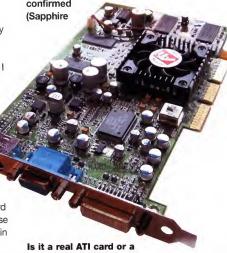
"When I emailed them asking for a complete refund or a replacement ATI Radeon 8500le clocked at 250/250, they said there was nothing they could do as they never said it was a genuine ATI card," explains Phillip. "They seem to be deliberately misleading people and I'm not the only person who thinks this."

According to Eclipse, you did contact them and inform them that you were expecting a genuine (built-by) ATI Radeon 8500 video card, as opposed to the chipset on a third-party/generic circuit board. "Obviously there is a large price difference between the two products and the customer has shown no inclination to pay the difference," explains a spokesperson for the company. "We

cannot supply a £150-plus card for the same price – and no reasonable customer would expect us to do so."

They say they have responded to your emails explaining that "we do not believe we have misled them in any way and that there is nothing we can do regarding the replacement of the card for no charge. If it were possible to guarantee from a supplier that the generic nature of the card could be confirmed (Sapphire

Is it a real ATI card or a generic one? Tough, eh?

or Power Color for example) then we would list these accordingly but, as we cannot, we list them as generic cards."

They do appreciate that sometimes there can be confusion between generic and branded products where manufacturers choose to use the same or similar product codes, "and as such we are happy for customers to return the item for a refund of the purchase price under the Distance Selling Regulations."

They do apologise if they have caused any distress or confusion: "This is definitely not our intention. However, as we do list the 'built-by' ATI cards separately on our site, we are surprised the customer could not distinguish between the two." PZ

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We've performed massive surgery on our Buyer's Guide to give you an even clearer picture of what makes up the dream games machine. We've got three categories for each component, giving you the best performer, the best buy and the best budget. If you think we've got something wrong, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk, and if we print your suggestion we'll give you a GeForce 5 card from Gainward

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INTEL MOTHERBOARD

P4T-533C
STREET PRICE £136
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com
NOW £136 WAS £139
Following the success of its Intel-850-based P4T, ASUS release a revision based on the i850e chipset for the new 533MHz FSB Pentium 4s. With support for PC1066 RAMBUS and AGP4x, the P4T-533 manages to stand head and shoulders above the competition thanks to clever board design and high-quality components. If you have to have the best then you have to have this.

845E MAX2-BLR
STREET PRICE £117.50
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
NOW £117 WAS £124
The Max2-BLR from MSI is one of the most rounded Intel 845E packages we've seen. Based on the newest revision of the DDR-supporting chipset for the latest 533MHz FSB chips, MSI has brought in some clever extras including onboard 5.1 sound. The addition of Bluetooth allows wireless connectivity to enabled gadgets, plus readiness for a range of peripherals.

GA-8IEX
STREET PRICE £91.64
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk
NOW £91 WAS £92
Just because you're working to a tight budget, don't think you have to settle for second best. If you're after an entry-level Pentium 4 then you could do worse than check out the excellent GA-8IEX from Gigabyte. Along with support for the new 500Mhz FSB chips and DDR memories comes integrated Creative 5.1 sound and 10/100 network plus six USB2.0. For under £100 you can't do better.

INTEL PROCESSOR

PENTIUM 4 'B' 2.8GHZ
STREET PRICE £464.12
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk
NOW £464 WAS £467
The 2800Mhz Pentium 4 is scarily fast. Coupled with Ti4600 on our test box, frame-rates never dipped below the 100fps mark in all the games we played. Using the new 533MHz front-side bus, these new 'Northwood' Pentium 4s have double the on-chip cache of their 'Willamette' predecessors – if you've a motherboard new enough to support one you won't find anything quicker.

PENTIUM 4 'A' 2GHZ
STREET PRICE £153.92
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk
NOW £153 WAS £158
Pentium 4 'A' (or the 'Northwood' core as it is known) has doubled the cache of the previous-generation chips. Based on a 400Mhz bus, the 2Ghz chip is compatible with any of the i845/e i850/e motherboards and would be more than respectable in any gaming system. Look at the price difference between this and the top-end Intel chip on the left. Frightening isn't it?

CELERON 1.8GHZ
STREET PRICE £76.37
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk
NOW £76 WAS £69
With one quarter the cache of the newest Pentium 4s, the Celeron 1800Mhz may not seem like it's got the necessary guts for a decent gaming system but nothing could be further from the truth. At entry level these chips are a cost-effective way of getting an i845e/i850e system together, which can be upgraded to P4 later simply by swapping chips. It's a brilliant compromise solution.

AMD MOTHERBOARD

ASUS A7N8X
STREET PRICE £150
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com
NEW ENTRY
It's been a long time coming but everything good is worth the wait and finally we've got our hands on the nForce 2 in the form of the A7N8X from ASUS. Bringing everything NVIDIA have promised including DualDDR DDR400, AGP8X, dual LAN, Firewire, USB2.0 and other added goodies such as Serial-ATA, this new board sits numero uno thanks to an excellent feature set and blistering performance.

K7N420PRO
STREET PRICE £83.42
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
As the top nForce board, the K7N420Pro from MSI beat every KT266/266A offering we put it against. Add to the great performance an integrated GeForce2MX graphics chip plus separate AGP 4x slot, 100Mbit LAN, integrated 5.1 sound, and you'll agree it's perfect for seasoned enthusiasts and first-time gamers alike. Watch out for the nForce 2 boards, arriving next month though.

GA-7TXH
STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362 700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk
Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a fantastic Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, which is plenty good enough for gamers. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR266 boards for Athlon. A complete bargain if you're looking to build a cheap system around an AMD processor.

AMD PROCESSOR

ATHLONXP 2600+
STREET PRICE £269.07
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk
Running at 2.13Ghz the AthlonXP 2600+ is one of AMD's new family of thoroughbred CPUs. Built on a smaller manufacture process than the original AthlonXPs they promise to be quicker and cooler than their siblings and with reduced silicon comes one other benefit – reduced cost. While Intel's top chips costs almost £500, a seat at the bleeding edge of AMD's technology will cost around half that.

ATHLONXP 2100+
STREET PRICE £106.92
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk
Running at 1.8Ghz, the 2100+ AthlonXP is the quickest of AMD's original AthlonXP chips. Boasting both Quantispeed and 3DNow! Architectures plus fast cache and a 266Mhz bus speed, most existing Athlon motherboards will support it out of the box. In terms of bang for your buck this provides the best middle-ground solution for gaming that money can buy.

ATHLONXP 1800+
STREET PRICE £65.80
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk
Low-end Pentium 4s and AlthonXPs are now getting so cheap they rival the Durons and Celerons of this world – and that's exactly what we have here. AMD has traditionally been the cheaper of the two processor giants, and the AthlonXP 1800+ (top-end equipment not so long ago), has taken such a plunge in price it's within £5 of the old Best Budget chip, the Duron 1.3Ghz. Bargain.

HARD DRIVE

WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £146.87
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.wdc.com
With your game and media collections growing every day – some game installs use over 2Gb of your precious storage – what you need is a really big, fast hard drive and that's exactly what Western Digital deliver with the WD1200JB. 8Mb of cache and spin speeds of 7200RPM mean that this 120Gb beast thrashes all competition beating a large proportion of SCSI drives too.

BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB
STREET PRICE £77.55
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com
An old favourite at PC ZONE, the Barracuda ATA IV is packed full of clever technology, which allows this 60Gb beastie to spin at the heady heights of 7200RPM while sounding much less obtrusive than many 5400RPM units. Don't underestimate the difference this can make. If you're still struggling with space, and un-installing games to make room for your newest purchases – this could well be worth a dip.

U SERIES 6 40GB
STREET PRICE £57.57
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com
The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, and find themselves replaced in the hallowed PC ZONE Buyer's Guide pages by its younger brother the Series 6. With the same specs as the Series 5 these new drives run even quieter and cooler than before, and provide what must be considered the minimum amount of storage space for any self-respecting gaming system.

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CD REWRITER

PX-W4012TA
STREET PRICE £91.64
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522
WEBSITE www.plextor.be
A decent CD-rewriter provides a flexible storage solution, and most of the problems associated with the technology have been eradicated with this drive. If CD burning times of over five minutes won't be then look no further than the PX-W4012TA from Plextor. Cutting CDs in around two minutes this 40x leviathan has a full range of countermeasures including Burn-Proof to make coasters a thing of the past.

CRW3200E-VK
STREET PRICE £86.94
MANUFACTURER Yamaha
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.yamaha-europe.com
It might not be as fast as the Plextor drive but this is still a superb buy. Yamaha has consistently been praised for making great long-lasting CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the companies' current range-topper. The overall bundle is excellent but we particularly love its Audiomaster burning mode for cutting high-quality audio CDs – and we're sure you will too. A veritable bargain if ever we saw one.

40X12X48 CDRW
STREET PRICE £45.82
MANUFACTURER LiteOn
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.liteonit.com
The LiteOn 40x12x48 offers stunning value for money, costing slightly more than many standard CD-ROM drives. While maybe not as feature-packed as the Plextor and Yamaha it does have a few tricks up its sleeve, including Smart-Burn – a technology which assesses media quality and adjusts burn speeds to reduce coaster ratio. The best low-cost drive that money can buy.

GRAPHICS CARD

SAPPHIRE ATLANTIS RADEON 9700
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
TELEPHONE 020 8879 6407
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com
NEW ENTRY
We thought it would be months before we'd see boards based on the Radeon 9700 Pro dipping below £300, but Sapphire obviously had other ideas. Delivering the same high framerates as the Hercules card previously listed the Sapphire is around £60 cheaper missing only the cosmetic memory cooling.

VERTO TI4200 64MB
STREET PRICE £124.54
MANUFACTURER PNY
TELEPHONE 01256 338 609
WEBSITE www.pny-europe.com/uk
The Verto Ti4200 64Mb GeForce4 from PNY is a relatively late arrival. Coming within 20 per cent of Ti4600 in many benchmarks, but costing up to half the money, it has all of the features of the quicker GPU without the associated dent in your wallet. Overall, we think this is the best solution if you're looking to future-proof your system without spending a ridiculous amount of cash along the way.

EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO
STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER HiTech
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk
The Excalibur Radeon 9000 Pro may not be the fastest DirectX8.1 board but it's certainly the cheapest. Coming in at well under the price of the equivalent Hercules board, it sports ATI's new mainstream GPU and 64Mb of 275Mhz DDR (500Mhz). This HiTech board is a great step-up to playing shader-dominated games for the budget-conscious.

SOUNDCARDS

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLATINUM/EX
STREET PRICE £211.50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com
Successor to the Sound Blaster Livel Series, the newer Sound Blaster Audigy brings with it a pile of new toys including EAX advanced HD and on-board Firewire. The Platinum/EX card sits at the top of the family with an external breakout box which moves all the important ports and connectors of the Platinum onto your desk.

AUDIGY2
STREET PRICE £99.99
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com
NEW ENTRY
The original Sound Blaster Audigy sat in this slot from the day it arrived, only to be replaced by it's next of kin, Audigy2. Delivering further improved audio quality, though this time over 6.1 channels of Dolby Digital EX, Audigy2 is the first soundcard to receive THX certification and deliver the fidelity required to reproduce new formats such as DVD-Audio. Pound-for-pound it's the best gaming soundcard in the world.

GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DIGITAL EDITION
WAS £45 NOW £37
STREET PRICE £37.50
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com
As a frequent offender on the *PC ZONE* Buyer's Guide, the Fortissimo II lived in the Best Bargain slot for many months – only to be replaced by its doppelgänger the Fortissimo II Digital Edition – which adds 5.1 for your DVDs and an even better software bundle.

MICE

INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER V3.0
STREET PRICE £37.59
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
Probably the cheapest upgrade you can perform, but if you're playing with a rubbish mouse it could give you the biggest performance increases. Hardcore gamers love the Intellimouse Explorer v3.0, and we have to agree that it's the best ball-less rodent out there. With improved optical sensors, a better shape and even more responsive buttons it's in a word – fragtastic.

MX500
STREET PRICE £35
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Microsoft might dominate the mouse market but it hasn't got everything its own way. The MX500 is one of the most interesting mice we've seen for a while now. The left and right buttons are hidden – being integrated into the upper shell of the body and on top of the fourth and fifth buttons. There are two either side of the wheel to assist scrolling, plus one that emulates Alt-Tab. Very handy.

OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £25.84
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
For gamers who don't need five buttons and a portable back-scratcher on their mice, we present the Optical Mouse Blue. With all of the high-tech optical wizardry of the other Microsoft mice, this funky blue three-buttoned offering is extremely comfortable to use and is perfect for RPG/RTS titles – or FPS-ers who prefer to keep most of their controls on the keyboard.

KEYBOARDS

PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £52.87
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk
While it may seem odd to have a Mac product amongst all this PC goodness we have good reason. Rather than faff around with 15 multifunction buttons which don't help at all in fast-paced gaming, the Pro Keyboard from Apple is simply the best USB offering out there. Quality components make it one of the most quiet and compact offerings money can buy. You get what you pay for, remember.

OFFICE KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £28.19
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
Microsoft's office keyboard may seem more focused at the professional market with the MSOffice buttons across the top, but we found the scroll wheel and remappable keys brilliant in many games – in some situations acting like an additional mouse wheel, one for weapons, the other for items. Handy shortcuts abound and brilliant all-round performance make this our new Best Buy.

MULTIMEDIA KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £21.14
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
The Multimedia Keyboard can only be described as the geek's friend. With support for many of the Windows XP customisations plus dedicated buttons for the instant messenger app of your choice and a central console of buttons to drive media player, life doesn't get much simpler and, at under £25, not much cheaper either. If you're struggling with a poor keyboard give the pub a miss for one night and get this.

JOYPAD

WINGMAN CORDLESS
STREET PRICE £34.07
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
The PC might not have a definitive gamepad just yet, but this is as close as it gets for the moment. The infra-red interface doesn't hinder your input. On the contrary, the fact it's wireless means your desktop is less cluttered and the discreet receiver is almost invisible. Comfortable to use and a doddle to set up, it makes the grade as best performance but only by a short distance.

FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD
STREET PRICE £24.99
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk
This wired, force-feedback version of the Firestorm wireless might not win any awards for looks, but its ergonomics are great. Decent soft grips with superbly placed buttons and a decent d-pad make precision control a breeze. Set-up couldn't be simpler and the rumble ain't bad either. A no-nonsense pad for no-nonsense gamers.

SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY
STREET PRICE £12.92
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder
Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and at under £13 really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear. We've used them in the office for years and we've never heard a word against them.

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JOYSTICK

HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk
Have we finally snapped? £249 for a joystick? You could get a brand new GeForce 4 for that and still have enough change to go out on the razz for a couple of weeks. Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, complete with tome-like manual. For those that have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane... If you're strong enough to lift it out of the box.

SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £52.87
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder
The Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 is a fine stick with perhaps the best, most refined force-feedback settings around. Performance is great overall, with the infra-red activation sensors in the handle. Its huge base will keep it planted on your desk and as long as you don't mind the extra wiring for the external power supply, it makes a great enhancement for any airbound frolics.

CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk
Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line, former Best Buy, USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both durable and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for with response and accuracy both unequalled. If you're not interested in force-feedback effects (and to be honest who is these days?) this is the stick to go for.

SPEAKERS

MEGAWORKS 510D
STREET PRICE £299.62
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.uk.europe.creative.com
The Megaworks 510D is the Daddy of gaming speakers – five 70W satellites and one 150W digitally amplified subwoofer together deliver 500W of power to recreate subtle sounds and devastating explosions alike. Want to know how those soldiers on Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honour* really felt? Now's your chance. Just make sure your neighbours are away first.

PROMEDIA 4.1
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.klipsch.com
Klipsch's Promedia 4.1 took Best Buy many months ago with their TXH-Approval and great sound reproduction. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers to split your ears as well as the Crossfires from VideoLogic did. Whether you're a gamer or an audiophile looking for your PC to make sweet music, these are the business, as long as you can find an outlet willing to serve them up.

XPS210
STREET PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com
Who needs surround sound? Answer: everyone who can afford it. For everyone else, this small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set-up is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue it looks the part too...

HEADPHONES

HD600
STREET PRICE £200
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk
The HD600 are Audiophile-level headphones, and unless used with a soundcard like the Audigy Platinum/EX are total overkill for most gamers. That doesn't stop their fantastic response range from reproducing every gunshot and explosion perfectly with bass so deep and strong you'll be convinced your speakers are running too. They won't obviously – you'll have sold them to finance these.

HD497
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk
Replacing the HD200 Masters – which used to occupy our Best Buy slot comes the HD497 – also from Sennheiser. These new headphones have an enhanced frequency response range which might not come close to the HD600, but is still pretty damn good. Their extremely comfortable design coupled with easily replaceable parts, mean these headphones could well outlast your PC.

GAMEVOICE USB
STREET PRICE £34.07
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com
When are headphones more than just headphones? Simple – when they're the Microsoft Gamevoice USB. The Gamevoice allows you to talk to your mates online as you play clan games with a handy control panel which lets you switch between comms channels. Adding a new dimension to your gaming online, and doubling as a decent set of headphones they're a bit of a bargain.

TFT

180MT
STREET PRICE £1,100
MANUFACTURER Philips
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk
The 180MT from Philips is more than just a flat panel. An 18-inch fourth-generation screen with VGA connectivity plus inputs for Scart, S-Video and an RF tuner mean that you can ditch you telly and pipe all manner of consoles, TV and video kit through the one screen. You can even use picture-in-picture to watch the latest *Futurama* while you die repeatedly in *BF1942*. Classic.

4332
STREET PRICE £640.37
MANUFACTURER iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk
Winner of our 17in flat panel group test, the 4332 from iiyama is packed with liquid crystal goodness. With the best contrast and colours we've seen from any flatscreen coupled with excellent pixel response times, this is one of the first screens which make the idea of a gaming TFT a reality. The boss, Dave Woods, has actually got this on his desk and he loves it. The git.

T1620B
STREET PRICE £522.87
MANUFACTURER Sharp
TELEPHONE 0800 262 958
WEBSITE www.sharp.co.uk
Sharp's 16-inch T1620B is over £100 cheaper than the iiyama and delivers all the visual goodies albeit on a smaller display area. Delivering 1280 x 1024 on a digital 75Hz, this screen will make your games look great while allowing you to reclaim some desktop real estate from large lumbering CRTs. If TFTs aren't quite affordable yet, this proves that the day isn't far away.

MONITOR

GDM-FW900
STREET PRICE £1,139
MANUFACTURER Sony
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.sony.co.uk
Do you remember the day when PCs used to ship with 14-inch screens? Pah. The gigantic 24-inch GDM-FW900 from Sony has to be seen to be believed. Costing almost double that of the iiyama Vision Master Pro 512, you'd expect something special and that's exactly what you get. Supporting nutty resolutions such as 2304x1440 at 80Hz, you can be sure this ultra-flat screen will deliver a rock-solid picture at all times.

VISION MASTER PRO 512
STREET PRICE £585.15
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk
Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested – 20 inches instead of 22, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. There's also a four-port USB hub and integrated speakers which are OK for Windows use, but may be slightly tinny for games or music.

720P 17-INCH CRT
STREET PRICE £118.67
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360 400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com
For the budget-conscious gamer Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it does 1280x1024 at an excellent 85Hz (and for those mad enough, 1600x1200 at 75Hz). Focus is tight and the picture sharp, and considering you're paying a little over £100 there's not a lot that will touch this for the money. If you've still got a 15in monitor, consider yourself rebuked.

MP3 PLAYER

APPLE IPOD
STREET PRICE £399 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/ipod
With all of the styling of their desktop systems, the iPod caused a few dropped jaws for looks alone. Packing a 20Gb hard disk and speedy Firewire interface, the new models are finally Windows-compatible and come with excellent headphones and a tiny little inline remote control that means you don't have to keep fishing it out of your pocket to change tracks or up the volume.

ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £330 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com
While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. Sound is fantastic but as with a lot of other players on the market, the bundled headphones are shite.

M-ANY ULTRASM
STREET PRICE £179.95 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER M-Any
TELEPHONE 0115 963 0222
WEBSITE www.mp3players.co.uk
As one of the smallest solid state MP3 players in the world, we reckon the Ultrasm from M-Any is also one of the best. Available in both 128Mb and 256Mb configurations, this tiny little device is about the size of six credit cards, and comes bristling with accessories and not-too-naff headphones. You're not going to fit your entire collection on it, but at least it will fit in your pocket.

AIR RAGE

▶▶ EXTENDED PLAY

Finishing a game is only the beginning in Extended Play. Maps, mods, add-ons and extras are all here to help you get the most out of what you play

WENDY HOUSE

■ **HOSTESS** Rhianna Pratchett

▲ Be warned, some of you may cringe when you see the subject of our Games That Changed The World this issue. Yes, it's the all-American, sanitised and baby-talking *Sims*. The famous dollhouse franchise might have become somewhat of a mockery with its endless expansion packs and squeaky clean image, but it's easy to forget that the original *Sims* got a much warmer reception, even in the hallowed pages of *PC ZONE*. It was hailed as a big step forward in gaming and "more addictive than breathing". Check out page 174 and see what the developers have to say about the game's development, as well as what they think about the criticisms levelled at the franchise.

If you prefer a more cerebral environment, turn to page 148 for our tutorial on creating plug-ins using *Morrowind*'s construction set. The tutorial will help you get to know your way around the editor and build your first house. You can pick up more tips from the online links included, and enter our plug-in design competition and win yourself some tasty prizes.

There's another prize up for grabs in this month's Retro Zone, namely a copy of the original classic strategy game *Laser Squad*, which retro fans everywhere should be dribbling over the prospect of adding to their collection. So there we go, premium extended play on toast – all you need to do is reach ▼ out to us.

Modified unreality

ON THE CD DVD The mod community have already started tinkering with *UT2003*
■ www.unrealtournament2003.com

Car Park is a frantic level for a small group.

Health. Not looking good.

It's not as unforgiving as the original sniper rifle, but the lightning gun is still great.

IT'S BEEN a long time coming, but *Unreal Tournament 2003* was finally released last month and the mod community has the new *Unreal* engine in their grasp. Already we've seen a number of mutators available for download and maps have been plentiful too. We've seen giant pits designed to show off the Karma physics engine (watch your player model drop like a rag doll down through a pit's dark recesses), to new vehicle-based maps.

Don't wait about – always go for glory with the flag.

The team at Epic always intended for *UT2003* to be as easily modifiable as possible and already various spins on the existing gameplay are in the works, from resurrecting the Assault mode included in the original *UT* to whole new scenarios. The usual suspects are attempting a special ops mod to rival the likes of *Counter-Strike*, which may prove fruitful with the use of the new *Unreal* technology. Just imagine how the Karma physics could improve on the look of the original *CS*.

While many of the mods in development are in their early stages at the time of going to press, there are already some very competent map designs available that have been put together by the more experienced *UT* mappers. First up on the discs is the Dead Cat CTF Map Pack featuring some of the best CTF maps available and looking almost as good as the Epic-developed maps themselves. Considering it's so soon after the game's initial release, these maps are looking pretty damn good.

Also on the discs is the Dead Cat Bombing Run Map Pack, which features many of the maps from the CTF pack that have then been re-engineered and modified for bombing run matches. The Acid Pipe map has even been designed with low gravity matches in mind, and moves gameplay focus to the use of special moves using the adrenaline pick-ups. Expect to see more next month.

CHEATS AHOY!

ON THE CD DVD The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to know to cheat your way through *No One Lives Forever 2*, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, *Sudden Strike 2*, *Cossacks: The Art Of War*, *Nocturne* and *Army Men RTS*. And in case you're in any doubt, just remember: those who can, do... those who can't, cheat. It's the only way.

Doomed to be 3D

It's back! Well, another version is anyway, and this one looks a bit nifty

■ www.doomsdayhq.com

WHILE UNREAL *Tournament 2003* will do a sterling job of maintaining the FPS genre this Christmas, it's not *Doom*. It's hasn't got the super shotgun and it'll never scare you the way *Doom* did the first time you saw a Cyber Demon pacing towards you from the darkness of the corridor ahead.

Worry not, *Doom* fans – there is a solution while you wait for the next instalment in the series. Say hello to *jDoom*. Porting the game to a Win32 system and optimising the graphics as well as implementing 3D models of the classic enemies, *jDoom* uses the Doomsday engine to update id's classic for newer PCs.

It's already looking better than the original *Quake* and will have you re-living in stunning detail those shotgun-toting sleepless nights in front of your PC all over again. Pick up a load of Pro Plus, dust off that old *Doom* box and get fragging.

Line 'em up and take 'em down.

Quake III Arena 1.32

■ www.idsoftware.com

WE HAVEN'T HAD one for a while, but fresh from id this month is the new *Quake III Arena* and *Team Arena* point release, bringing the game up to version 1.32. Included as part of the release is the latest version of the Punk Buster anti-cheat software that id hope will cull the current wave of cheats occupying the Q3A servers. While it's only a matter of time before the cheats crack the new version, you should at least get a couple of weeks before someone gets suspiciously accurate again. Something that will also please those without broadband connection is the improved net code, which promises to improve the low bandwidth deathmatch experience considerably.

This'll be my flag.

No One Lives Forever 2

■ nolf2.sierra.com

IT WAS A surprise to say the least when *No One Lives Forever 2* proved to be the best single-player shooter of 2002, but this stealth shooter captured the heart of our esteemed editor with its intense action, great gameplay and sense of humour. But that's not the end of the story. As with every big FPS release, so the inevitable patching follows and we've got the first *NOLF2* update (v1.1) on on this month's discs. This patch will clear up any audio issues you maybe having with the game. We've also included a trailer for the game and a wallpaper pack full of tasty images of the nubile Miss Archer. Start as you mean to go on, then.

A banana in the wrong hands is deadly.

Morrowind

■ www.elderscrolls.com

INSPIRED by our instructions on how to build yourself a fancy house in *Morrowind* (page 148)? If you're thinking of trying your hand at a bit of plug-in design, then you should definitely take a look at our DVD this month. You can find all the of the official plug-ins for the game, which will give you an idea of how the professionals do things. We've even included the very latest (and rather nice) *Siege At Firemoth* plug-in. DVDers will also find both screenshot and wallpaper packs for the recently announced *Morrowind* sequel *The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal*. And to make sure you're running the latest version of the game, don't forget to pick up the latest patch (v1.2.0722) from our Essential Patches.

Patch up Morrowind and get editing.

THE GUIDE: CREATING PLUG-INS IN MORROWIND

Rhianna Pratchett shows you how to get to grips with the basics of designing a plug-in using *Morrowind*'s in-game editor

YOU'LL KNOW by now that *Morrowind* is one of our favourite role-playing games of all time here at *ZONE*, and that since the game's release, creating plug-ins for it has taken off in a big way. This has partly been due to its huge freeform world – ripe for fans to tinker with – but also because *Morrowind* boasts a sophisticated in-game toolkit. Play around with this and you get to reinvent your environment as much as you like.

So sellotape your eyes open, because this guide is going to take you through the basics of navigating your way around the Morrowind TES Construction Set. Then, when you've got to grips with the toolkit, you can have a go at our plug-in competition, details of which you'll find at the end of this tutorial. There are some great cash prizes to be won and also links to help you get more information on plug-in designing. You might even get your work reviewed in the hallowed pages of *PC ZONE*.

INSTALLING AND PREPARATION
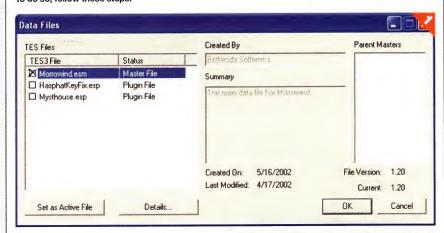
To be able to work properly within the editor you're obviously going to need a full version of *Morrowind* installed. It's best to set your screen to at least 1024x768 resolution at this point for maximum working comfort.

NB: This guide is intended just to get you started. For more detailed information, such as how to make your own scripts or create new textures, you'll need to install other bits and pieces from the second *Morrowind* CD. Check out our web links for more tips.
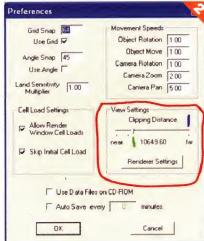
CONFIGURING THE EDITOR

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED, YOU NEED TO GET YOUR SETTINGS SORTED

Even though you've already set your screen resolution, you'll still need to readjust it in the editor as the game saves visibility in the editor separately.
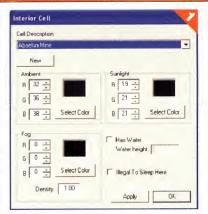To do so, follow these steps:

1. Start the Morrowind Construction Set

2. Click on File then Data Files

3. Activate the first entry, Morrowind.esm, by double-clicking it, so that it is highlighted as shown in the picture above.

4. Click OK to upload the file.

5. The Cell View window should now show all available cells from *Morrowind*. Click an entry once. Now enter the letters B A L M and then look for the entry Balmora in the left-hand column, with the grid co-ordinates -3, -3. Double-click this entry. Balmora is one of the most complicated areas of the game so if you have no problems with that, then fingers-crossed, you shouldn't have any problems with the rest of the editor.

6. After the objects have loaded, double-click on Hul, an NPC in the right-hand column.

7. You should now be able to see a character in the 3D view. Hold down Shift while you move the mouse over it. If the transition is relatively smooth you can skip steps 8 to 10.

8. If your PC is having problems with the amount of data on screen and displaying jerky or delayed movement, choose File and then Preferences.
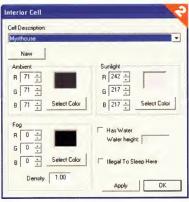
9. The relevant part in the above picture is marked with red. After installation, the clipping distance should be set to 'far' (blue marker). A reliable setting for a 1GHz AMD Duron with a GeForce 3 and 256Mb RAM would be round about the green mark.

10. Reset the clipping distance and if the mouse still isn't moving smoothly, then try setting the clipping distance even lower.

DESIGNING A PLUG-IN

In the case of *Morrowind*, a plug-in is anything that you create and then put back into the game. This might be something as simple as a piece of amour, or as complicated as a quest. We are going to show you the basics of creating a house plug-in.

Houses, just like dungeons, are called an Interior, meaning they have an inside you can design as well as an outside. An Exterior might be a new island or a new city. Since we want to build a new house we need a new interior cell. To make your own cell select World then Interior Cell. The window in image 1 appears.
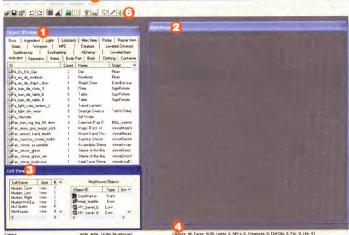
Click New to create a new cell and enter the name of your house (see image 2)

Ticking Illegal To Sleep Here means, as it suggests, that when players enter this house they won't be able to take a kip. You might use Has Water if you want a water-filled area in the house like a cellar. You can also adjust the height of the water. The function Sunlight is practical as it allows you to build the rooms in your house first and not to worry about the lighting. But later on you can add extra light sources like lamps and candles. In our case we don't need to change anything so just click Apply and then OK.

To load up your file, start the editor and click on the open folder. In the screen that opens up, make sure the Master File is checked. The plug-in you want to work on has to be activated as well. So just select the plug-in and click on Set as Active File and you're ready to go. To finish, click OK and the editor will upload your files.
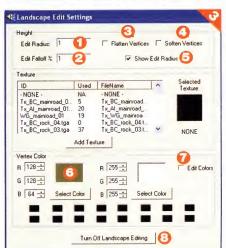
THE MAIN INTERFACE

1. The Object Window. Here you find all available objects you might need. These include furnishings like tables and plates, as well as complete houses, staircases, walls, NPCs, weapons and more.

2. This is the Render-Window where you'll be able to see your work in 3D and build it up step by step.

3. The Cell View. On the left side all cells from *Morrowind*, Interior and Exterior, are listed. Here you can rename, delete or upload cells. On the right-hand side of this window all objects of a corresponding cell are listed.

4. The Status bar. This shows you the progress of the level you're uploading.

5. In square brackets you see the name of the plug-in which is currently active.

6. The toolbar features the following, from left to right: Open, Save, Properties, Undo, Redo, Grid On/Off, Snap to Angle, Edit Landscape, Path Grid, Global Light On/Off, Fog On/Off, Dialogue (for NPCs), Script Editor, Sound Editor.

LANDSCAPE EDITING

Load Balmora, Grid -3, -3. Then jump to the NPC Hul, by double-clicking on it in the Cell View. You should be able to see the NPC in the window (see image 1).

Use the following to navigate around the level:

Shift + move mouse (without clicking) – Rotate around the object

Space + move mouse (without clicking) – Move object

Mouse wheel – Zoom In/Zoom Out

Move over to the city walls (as shown in image 2)

You'll need to flatten an area of the map to make room for your house. To do this start up the Landscape Editing tool (see image 3) by pressing H. Here's how it works:

LANDSCAPE INTERFACE
1. This determines size. The higher the value, the bigger the effect.

2. This allows you to edit the percentage falloff.

3. This tool allows you to flatten whole mountains very quickly, but be careful as it's very easy to flatten more than you wanted to.

4. With this you can smooth down rough angles in the landscape, like using a sanding tool.

5. This activates/deactivates the tool marker.

6. Use this tool to choose the colours you want to use over your textures.

7. Activate this in order to paint colour over your textures. Deactivate it if you want to lift or lower the landscape.

8. Click here to leave the landscape editing tool.

To follow this tutorial you will need the following settings: Radius 3, Falloff NA, Flatten off, Soften off, Edit Colours off. Now click in the window and reduce the mountain a bit in size, so you've got a flat area in which to place your house.
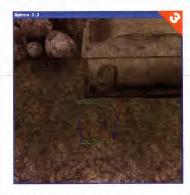
To put a house in your landscape go to the Object Window and select the Static tab (image 1). Your screen should show the following, which is a list of objects you can use in your level. Remember to save your work at regular intervals – the quickest way to do this is to press Ctrl + S.

The house you want is labelled ex_hlaalu_b_05. You can drag and drop these objects directly into the window. Release it roughly where you flattened the mountain.

Once the house has been selected, it can be moved by clicking onto the object with the left mouse button, and holding the button down until you have dragged the object where you want. Then you just release it (all objects can be moved this way).

To get the object to touch the ground, (it won't be the first time you drag an object into the window, instead it will look like it's standing on air), just press F after the object has been selected. Turn the house 270 degrees to get the entrance facing the river (see image 2).

To insert a door click on the Door tab in the Object Window. All doors that are available are listed here. You can just drag and drop a door into the window, and if the door doesn't fit or doesn't look good just delete it and try a different one. For this tutorial we have used the in_hlaalu_loaddoor_01 door, and the door can be rotated in the same way as any other object (see image 3). Move the door into position and add windows to your house in the same way as you added the door (see image 4).

EDITING THE INSIDE

So far so good, but if you can't get into your house it's not going to be much fun. You need to activate the Teleporter which will transfer you from the outside of the house to the inside... Double-click the door and you should get the dialogue window seen in image 1.

To activate Teleport just tick the checkbox and choose your cell from the Load Cell list.

Click Select Marker and the editor will automatically load the inside of the house (see image 2). This is empty. In *Morrowind* the exterior of a house has nothing to do with the interior. They work rather like the Tardis in that you can build huge rooms inside small houses or place the windows at completely different points to the outside.
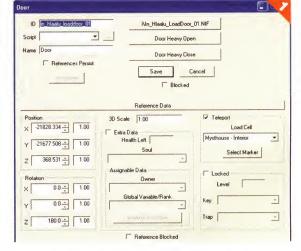
Most of the items that you'll need to construct the inside of

your house are located under the Static or the Door menus. Only the door is a bit difficult, so that's the best place to start. The first thing you'll need to do to is position a doorframe, which can be found under in_c_doorframe_01. The doorframe needs to be rotated by 180 degrees and fitted to the wall in the corner. The corner of the house can also be re-positioned, which you can do with the grid active on the toolbar and selecting in_c_plain_room_corner from the menu. If you've done it right the corner and doorframe should look like image 3.

Choose the internal door from the Door menu. We have used the hlaalu_loaddoor_02 door. The door needs to be slightly enlarged to fit the doorframe, so just double-click and type in 1.03 under 3D – Scale in the menu. Now take

the arrow and move it into the direction the players are supposed to face when they come in. Normally that means the tip of the arrow is pointing inwards (see image 4).

The windows can be inserted in the same way as the door (see image 5). While you're furnishing the inside of the house you might find you need the same object more than
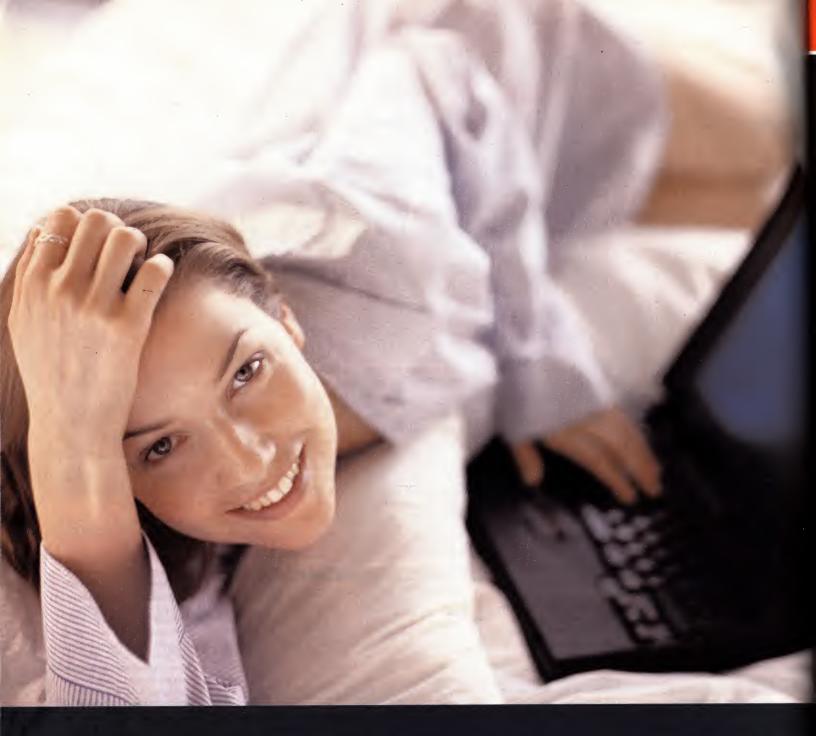
once and Ctrl + D duplicates it. The objects will be lying on top of each other so you just have to move them into position.

Currently you can get into the house but you can't leave it. Double-click the inner door and activate the Teleport function like before, only now you will need to select the cell Balmora (-3,-3). You only have to click the Select Marker and Balmora will be loaded into the window, which may take a couple of seconds. In Balmora you now have to move the arrow to your door, since the arrow will be inserted automatically into the middle of Balmora -3, -3. Make sure your arrow points in the direction of the river, because that's the way you want players to come out of the house.

And voila! You've just created your first *Morrowind* plug-in, a beautiful new home. Congratulations. Now if you think you're ready to go it alone, fire up your construction kit, stock up on caffeine potions and make us a masterpiece. There are big prizes to be won, so what are you waiting for? (Turn the page for all the details.)

Many thanks to Thorsten Sommer for providing the groundwork for this tutorial.

PC CD-ROM

The Elder Scrolls III
MORROWIND
The Sequel to Arena and Daggerfall

Ubi Soft

**Design a plug-in and
become very rich.**

WIN CASH!
£2000 MUST BE WON IN OUR MORROWIND PLUG-IN COMPO

SO YOU'VE been creating plug-ins for *Morrowind* since the launch of Bethesda's mammoth RPG have you? Or has the Construction Set been sitting in the box untouched because you haven't the foggiest idea what you're supposed to do with it? Either way *PC ZONE* and Euro-Morrowind.com have gotten together to bring you two awesome competitions whatever your skillset. Check out the tutorial over the past few pages and when you think you're ready get designing, show us your hard graft and you could win some cold hard cash.

HOW TO ENTER
ENTRY LEVEL
Design a plug-in (under 1Mb) using existing game content and modifying it with *Morrowind*'s scripting abilities. Entries cannot contain any new game content, including game models and animation, terrain textures, retextured existing models, game music or any other resources that you create externally from the *Morrowind* Construction Set.

ADVANCED LEVEL
Design a plug-in that fits on one CD, which makes use of new game content that has to be created externally from the *Morrowind* Construction Set, including new game models, textures and sound or music files. You can use anything you like to create the extra content and also include any existing game content. All new resources must be implemented into the game in some way. Extra resources that are submitted but not implemented into the game within the submitted plug-in file will not be considered as part of the entry.

JUDGING
Your entries will be judged by *PC ZONE* in conjunction with a panel of *Morrowind* fans from Euro-Morrowind.com and we'll put the 10 best on the cover discs. You can then vote for your favourites at www.pczone.co.uk and the results will go towards deciding the best mod from each competition.

HINTS TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS
1) Plan ahead so that you know exactly what you intend to do before you set out to do it.
2) Try out a few existing plug-ins to see what kind of things people are likely to do. You can download some at www.euro-morrowind.com/ or check out some of the official plug-ins at www.elderscrolls.com. We've got some on this issue's cover discs as well.
3) Talk to people who know what they're doing – check out www.euro-morrowind.com/forums or drop by channel #elderscrolls on irc.quakenet.org
4) Point your browser towards www.pczone.co.uk/morrowind for more in-depth guides and links to

Morrowind fansites as well as more info on the prizes you can win along with the details on how to vote for the winning entries.

PRIZES
The first 100 entrants across both competitions will receive a limited edition *Morrowind* sweatshirt and cap.

First Prize in the Advanced and Entry Level competitions includes a cash prize of £500, one Thrustmaster Tactical Board Hardware, one set of 10 Ubi Soft Games, one copy of *The Elder Scroll 3: Morrowind Collectors' Edition* and one set of the limited edition *Morrowind* sweatshirt and cap.

Second Prize in the Advanced and Entry Level competitions includes a cash prize of £250, one set of 10 Ubi Soft Games and one set of a the limited edition *Morrowind* sweatshirt and cap.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS
1. All submissions should include a readme detailing what the plug-in contains.
2. Submissions may not infringe upon other parties copyrighted materials and trademarks.
3. Entry-Level entries can be sent in on floppy, CD or by e-mail to letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject marked Morrowind Compo. Advanced-Level entries will ONLY be accepted on CD and you must send in two copies, on two CDs.
4. Prizes may not be exchanged or transferred and there is no cash alternative for non-cash prizes. The winners of both competitions will be utilised in a press release announcing the names and country of residence. We plan to publicise any statements made by them or attributed to them relating to this promotion or the prize received.
5. Ensure your name and address is printed clearly on every entry. Postal entries should be sent to: Morrowind Competition, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD. (Closing date: December 31, 2002.)

Please include the following information:
■ Title, Forename, Surname, Address, Postcode, Daytime phone number and your e-mail address.
■ Please indicate if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.
■ Please indicate on the postcard if you are under 18 years of age.
■ Please indicate on the postcard if you are a current subscriber.

■ Entrants must be resident within the UK, Eire, Isle Of Man and Channel Islands. Employees of Ubi Soft Entertainment Ltd, Euro-Morrowind and Dennis Publishing are not eligible. Closing date for entries is 31 December, 2002. Entries received after this date will not be included in either competition.
The prize winners will be notified by written notification posted to the address stated on the CD entered within 90 days of the closing date for receipt of entries.

EURO-MORROWIND.COM

THE MODSQUAD

Tony Lamb finds more quality mods under his Christmas tree

The Barrett sniper rifle is just not suited to close-quarters scrapping.

The machine-gun hits hard but is wildly inaccurate.

FRONT LINE FORCE 1.7A

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 110Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.flfmod.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

FRONT LINE Force has gone from strength to strength and is now one of the top mods around. In gameplay terms it's most like *Counter-Strike*, being an objective-related team-based shooter, but its class structure adds a new dimension, and the omission of *Counter-Strike*'s annoying end-of-game respawn delay is very welcome too. The class choices are Recon, Assault and Support. Each of these has

relative speed and armour and the same basic weapons choice, although the Recon and Support grunts can also choose a sniper rifle or machine-gun. The sniper rifle is impressive, but not very accurate unless the player is prone; the machine-gun is also effective, but due to the close-quarter battle nature of most maps, its use is limited.

And what classy maps they are. With a bunch of original classics, and several map

packs available, fans of virtually any type of shootout will find something they like. These are well-designed, well-detailed and clever designs, with a wealth of nooks and crannies that lead to some truly frantic firefights. No single class has an inbuilt advantage, and the relatively weak armour for everyone means getting shot is a very bad idea – even if you're only dead for ten seconds. Player and weapon skins are as sweet as

the maps, with great animations and sounds. Somebody really took some time to make this mod look great.

FLF has many more features too; your HUD will keep you informed not only of how much health and ammunition you have, but it also indicates via radar where your team-mates are and the location and capture-progress of the mission-critical points your team has to secure or defend. Stamina too is shown on

screen, and will decrease if you run too much. Your weapons' accuracy reduces with prolonged fire as the recoil affects your aim. All excellent stuff.

Servers are limited but you should be able to find one to guarantee a good game. LAN is a blast. Get stuck in now.

PCZONE VERDICT 90
Better than ever

TIMEGATE

SINGLE-PLAYER

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 77Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*
■ fear.rtcwfiles.com

TIMEGATE for *RTCW* is an add-on map pack more than a mod in the dictionary definition of the word, but it's a great reason (should you need one) to get back into id's atmospheric shooter nonetheless.

Set in the modern day (to begin with), you're called to an archaeological dig to investigate a strange new discovery and, of course, when you stick your nose in all hell breaks loose. Initially it's dungeons, tombs, dungeons and more tombs, which you'll have to fight your

way around. But the mapping is very much on an epic scale and you'll encounter some vast caverns and great underground architecture even before locating the timegate that you've come to see.

Passing through the gate, you'll be whisked back to 1945 for more slaughter and some equally impressive maps – both indoor and out. There, your objective is to get back to the modern day and of course, there's a full complement of enemies to deal with on the way.

It's certainly not easy, although the run-and-shoot routine might become a bit repetitive. The music is suitably nerve-jangling, and the cut-scenes add enough in the way of explanation, but the voice-acting makes late-night Channel 5 look highbrow. Still, any fans of the game will find more than enough to keep them busy.

PCZONE VERDICT 75
Classic *Wolfenstein* fun

Heyyyy... lookin' hot baby.

Afterwards' minigun cuts 'em down to size.

A flamethrower raises the temperature.

The pistol is effective, but here it's out-classed.

AFTERWARDS BETA 2

ON THE DVD ■ **SIZE** 59Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Quake III*, patched to v1.31
■ www.planetquake.com/afterwards

AFTERWARDS is a total conversion for *Quake III* with all-new characters, maps, weapons and sounds. Like many mods it's set in the future, but that's almost all you need to know in terms of background storyline because the two game types – Deathmatch and Tactical

(an objective-based Team Deathmatch variant) – are fairly familiar fodder and the storyline proper is a bit over-the-top anyway.

It goes something like this: the two teams – The Wasteland Tribes and the Australians – are the sole survivors of a global

disaster (imagine Aussies inheriting the world? Strewth!) and, failing to reach agreement in the face of adversity, they set about slaughtering each other. This is a good, messy Deathmatch, but the Tactical gameplay, where each team has a set of objectives to achieve, is

just as good if you have a LAN or can find a server online.

Some players might find *Afterwards* a bit basic, as it's been designed with a very average PC in mind, so the models and map textures used are low in detail compared to some but, in its favour, it

proved a doddle to install, is totally stable and is a good, enjoyable blastabout.

PCZONE VERDICT **69**

High-spec version please!

Dying inflicts a ten-second respawn penalty.

TOUR OF DUTY 101

ON THE DVD ■ **SIZE** 74Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.tourofdutymod.com

IF YOU fancied yourself as a drug-riddled gun-wielding teenage psychopath in the 1970s then your choices were pretty limited. It was either a lifetime in prison or a career in the US marines, and luckily for the military planners in Vietnam an awful lot of kids chose the latter. *Tour Of Duty* gives you the chance to do your gook-fragging by proxy and sees you back in 'Nam for some action-packed Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag blood-letting.

ToD shows a great deal of promise with a class-based system including riflemen, snipers and RPG-carriers, but at the moment it suffers from wooden character animations,

unpolished maps and other niggling faults that detract from what is basically a good mod. It's much like an early *Day Of Defeat* at this stage. What makes *ToD* stand out are the genuinely clever features including the Officer class option, whose presence endows his team with a morale boost to improve agility and weapons accuracy, and the fixed gun emplacements with which players can attack the enemy.

Tour Of Duty certainly looks like a classic in the making. Only time will tell.

PCZONE VERDICT **73**

Definitely one to watch

APOCALYPSE WEAPONS BETA 7

ON THE DVD ■ **SIZE** 1.6Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Unreal Tournament*, patched to version 436 with Bonus Pack #1
■ www.planetunreal.com/aw

Rank: 2 / 7
Spread: -1
Apocalypse Weapons' flamethrower works a treat.

APOCALYPSE
Weapons: Beta 7 is the latest version of this mutator (mini-mod) for *Unreal Tournament* that replaces most of the standard weapons with a range of new ones. These aren't, however, the sensible weapons of the realism mods – no M16s or AK-47s here – but a bunch of mad, bad and totally mental über-weapons that throw realism out of the window. Rockets become pinball rockets, bouncing off walls in a

succession of explosions. Grenades fly straight, explode once, then bounce around before exploding again. Sniper rounds will go through two people. The Redeemer becomes the Apocalyser – similar to a super-powered shock rifle – and the Flak Cannon becomes the Brimstone, firing rocks that break up on impact, damaging anyone nearby. In secondary mode the Brimstone fires a huge boulder that explodes, inflicts vast damage and will even kill you if

you're too close. The earthquake it generates is very unnerving.

To counter all this firepower, the regular *UT* armour becomes Apocalypse Armour, a beefed-up version that's much tougher and generates appropriately stompy footsteps too.

Choose a suitably large map and try it. It's mad, but fun...

PCZONE VERDICT **68**

Big guns for nutters

DISC PAGES

■ **DISCS & WORDS** Mark Eveleigh & Rhianna Pratchett

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

CD1/DVD Pub: Microsoft **Reviewed:** Issue 123 (90%)

We've had to wait three years for Ensemble Studios to complete their latest RTS, but the wait has definitely been worth it as you can see from our review on page 74. Just in time for going to press this month, we got word from Microsoft that they had a huge demo ready and they haven't let us down.

With two campaign maps and two random maps to choose from, the demo lets you play right up to the third age in single-player under the watchful eye of Zeus, god of the Heavens. The campaigns will give you a taste of the story-driven game, while the random maps give you free reign over the landscape to take on a single opponent using all of the buildings and units available up to the third age.

The first campaign mission sees you commanding the armies of Atlantis with your hero Arkantos while Kraken and pirates attack your home. Basically a tutorial mission to get you building up armies, you are tasked with maintaining unit production and using your divine powers to increase farming yield with rain or restore your troops' health. That way your troops will be much better

Right-click to attack this Pirate Ship.

"Calamari on the beach, all you can eat"

This is what happens when you attack the Kraken with ordinary units.

equipped to take out the pirate ships, but leave the Kraken to Arkantos as he has a significant advantage over the myth units.

After you've fended off the pirates, you are asked to help retain the favour of Poseidon by returning his Trident from the clutches of the minotaur Karnos. This mission will allow you to build more hero units as well as myth units such as the Cyclops in order to lead your assault on the enemy base.

While the campaign scenarios will guide you through each task, your next move should be on to the random maps where you'll see many more of the game's features in action, including the more advanced mythical units. As you progress through each age, you are required to choose which god you wish to follow into the next era of your small

civilisation. The god you decide on will affect which myth units are available to you in the next age, providing a huge variety of strategic combinations to each map you play.

If all that gameplay wasn't enough for you, there's also a hefty encyclopedia covering the mythology behind the full game to get you in the mood for a trip to your nearest games retailer to buy *AoM*. Keep an eye out for the little details in the game such as your Hippocampus scout doing somersaults in the water.

WALKTHROUGH →

GET THROUGH THE CLASH OF THE TITANS WITHOUT A SCRATCH

1 When you start, your people will be in the archaic age, so the first thing to do is start gathering resources and building houses.

2 After you've set up a granary, a storehouse and a few more peasants, build a temple to start creating hero units and worshipping the gods.

3 Ah, your first hero has arisen from the favour of the gods. With all the upgrades completed, it's time to move on to the next age.

4 To progress to the next age, select a minor god to aid your people. Chose wisely, as this will affect which myth units you will be able to produce.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

CD1/DVD **Pub:** Infogrames **Reviewed:** Issue 122 (90%)

Not the best time to pick up the enemy flag...

You don't have to be beautiful to enter the tournament.

Unreal Tournament is back to satisfy another craving for arena-based FPS games and boasts better visuals and faster gameplay than before. What's more, Mark Rein and his team have done another fine job with a top demo including Deathmatch, CTF and Bombing Run games for those hungry for a taste of the action.

While Deathmatch and CTF modes stick to the same tried and tested formula to keep players happy, the new Bombing Run mode is an interesting update on single-flag CTF. You and your team have to run to the centre of the map to pick up the ball which then renders the ball carrier defenceless as they carry the ball gun, and can only to run with it or pass but not switch weapons.

It looks better than ever before, and plays more like *Quake* than the original, but it's definitely an acquired taste. Love it or hate it, *UT2003* is here and it's already one of the most popular multiplayer games on the Net so get fragging and see what you think.

WALKTHROUGH →

NOW YOU KNOW WHY IT'S CALLED A BOMBING RUN...

1 Your first task is to get your team to the ball without losing too many limbs. Take out anyone you encounter on the way, especially would-be ball carriers.

2 Get to that ball, whatever it takes. The bulk of the opposing team will be there with you, so try to expend as much ammo as possible before taking it.

3 Once you get it, run for the goal at your opposing team's base. If you run it through, you'll get more points than firing it so do a jump and hope you make it.

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE

CD2/DVD **Pub:** Electronic Arts **Reviewed:** Issue 123 (85%)

Bond is back on this latest outing for the PC and we've got a complete mission from the game for your enjoyment. Set in Japan, the demo sees you protecting VIP Alexander Mayhew from Rafael Drake's Yakuza henchmen as they try to take over his Tokyo estate. You soon discover that Mayhew is holding vital MI6 data that you must keep from Drake.

The armoury is varied, from the standard shotguns and rifles of most FPS titles to the more Bond-esque gadgets and cheesy cut-scenes. While it is sometimes difficult to resist shooting Mayhew himself as he whines at every move you make, you'll find the demo quite rewarding if you don't cap your colleague right away.

Shotgun beats rifle at this range, any day.

The ultimate PC gamer's set up.

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2

CD1/DVD Pub: Electronic Arts **Reviewed:** Issue 123 (69%)

With Ferrari, Lamborghini and Porsche now regular names on the NFS roster, a follow-up to the best game of the series, *NFS III: Hot Pursuit*, was always on the cards though some would argue they've gone a bit over the top in this outing. Such claims have been made based on the rather insane police tactics employed in the game to stop your driver from evading a speeding fine. From the maniacal police chases that made up the old *NFS* formula to the new helicopter bombs that the old bill seem happy to drop on several hundred thousand pounds' worth of car, just making it to the finish line is an achievement.

Even so, fans of *NFS* will gawp at the updated graphics and we highly recommend giving this demo a whirl if the *UT2003* demo has already got your adrenaline levels up to max.

Shouldn't have had that second kebab last night.

ARCHANGEL

CD1/DVD Pub: JoWooD **Reviewed:** Issue 123 (58%)

EXCLUSIVE

Nasty things, these semi-visible demons.

Quite possibly the strangest looking game for a while on our DVD, *Archangel* puts you in the role of Michael, an angry man with no fingers. Walking around the level much like one of the scousers in a Harry Enfield sketch, it's your task to vanquish the dark spirits attacking the monastery with your over-sized holy sword.

Annoyingly, you'll find that much tactical retreating is needed to have a proper scrap as Michael seems to be incredibly weak and runs out of energy very quickly, although this is probably something to do with the incredible size of his weapon. Ahem.

DEMONSTAR SM 1

CD2/DVD Pub: Mountain King Studios

Every now and again, a game goes up on the Web for download that has us all hooked like crack-addled 14-year-olds. *DemonStar* is one such title and proof that 2D scrolling shooters will always be fun, no matter how old or withered the genre gets.

The standard formula applies. You control a single ship taking on hordes of flying enemies as they try to spread your corpse evenly throughout the vastness of space. Using either the mouse or keyboard, this demo contains one full level from the full game with a number of power-ups from the full release. Who said the move to 3D was a step forward for games?

You can collect different super weapons to obliterate your opponents.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE CD

FIFA 2003, PROJECT NOMADS, HAEGEMONIA, RC RACERS DELUXE AND EARTH 2150: LOST SOULS

DVD EXCLUSIVES

EXCLUSIVE

THE MAKING OF SPLINTER CELL

This is the only time you're going to see *PC ZONE*'s exclusive Making of *Splinter Cell* feature before it gets shipped with the full game next year. The 14-minute footage shows the game's creators talking about how they developed the various aspects of Sam Fisher, the lead character. This includes how they filmed each other making the basic character movements so they could be copied onto Sam, and how a full spy-style bodysuit was constructed to help model Sam's outfit realistically.

EA PLAY FEATURETTE

EXCLUSIVE

If you've ever wanted to know what goes on in a games exhibition, look no further than our exclusive DVD video from this year's EA Play show. Here you'll find details on all the upcoming games from one of the worlds' largest games publishers, and interviews with a few of the developers from games such as *SimCity 4*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *C&C: Generals*.

GAME FOOTAGE

In this month's DVD video we've got ten minutes of exclusive spectacular *C&C: Generals* in-game footage, which shows off exactly why this 3D strategy is going to rock every inch of your fragile little world. Alongside this we've also got footage from *Jurassic Park: Genesis*, *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*, *Rayman 3*, *Madden NFL 2003*, *NBA Live 2003*, *F12002*, *AvP2: Primal Hunt* and *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*.

FIGHT CLUB

If you're interested in taking part in Fight Club and want to see just what you'll be up against, then take a look at our footage from the last *PC ZONE* free-for-all. Share with us the highs and the lows, the laughter and the tears, (well mostly tears), as Zoners and readers meet on the *Counter-Strike* battlefield.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE DVD

AMERICA'S ARMY, ROBIN HOOD, LASER SQUAD NEMESIS, TEAM FACTOR

PCZONE

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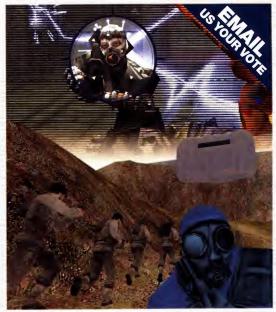(no stamp required)

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FIGHTCLUB

Yes we're still playing *Counter-Strike*, but who knows what'll happen next month... Keep your eye on our website, says *Martin Korda*

THE VOTES have started to trickle in for the game we'll be playing in our December Free-For-All, and so far it's neck and neck between *Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament 2003* and *Battlefield 1942*. If you'd like to have your say, send an email entitled 'Free-For-All Vote' to letters@pczone.co.uk, stating which of the above three games you'd like to play. We'll be announcing the winner on our website (www.pczone.co.uk) on December 1, so remember to keep an eye out.

However, until such time as we change things around – or not, as the case may be – it's *Counter-Strike* all the way. The September 12 Free-For-All again saw intense competition for the honour of being mentioned on this very page, and after some supremely brutal battles, the following earned a mention. Gilgamesh, [GM]Martin[GUN], [Obi.LeMSTA}, Spearchew, K.I.T and The Pro. Things were just as competitive in our October 10 Free-For-All as well, with xXx, UrplDahoodedclaw, Geds, logix, K.I.T, [GM]Martin[GUN] and KerleViL all warranting a mention.

Which means we have two clear leaders in the race to be the first names in our *PC ZONE* Hall of Fame. They are [GM]Martin[GUN], and K.I.T, both with three mentions to their names. Just two more to go and you're in lads. But what if *Counter-Strike* stops being the game of choice? Will you excel in other shooters too? Time will tell. The rest of you, get practising if you want to steal their thunder and beat them into the Hall of Fame. See you all next month.

UT2003, Battlefield 1942 or *Counter-Strike*. You choose.

EMAIL US YOUR VOTE

FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY 5 DEC

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike **OR** *Unreal Tournament 2003* **OR** *Battlefield 1942*

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Lee Cocker	Viper
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK ON THE DAY OF THE FREE-FOR-ALL TO FIND OUT WHICH GAME WE'LL BE PLAYING. SEND YOUR VOTE TO LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to play, go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1 –
[24hr 2fort]: *tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27025*
TFC Public Server #2 – [24hr Badlands]: *tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27035*

Quake III: Threewave: *q3.zonegames.co.uk:27970*

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 [All maps]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27015*
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – [3De_]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27025*

Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – [DualDust]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27035*
Counter-Strike Public Server #4 – [Classics]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27045*

Unreal Tournament Public Server: *ut.zonegames.co.uk:7807*

Wolfenstein Public Server: *rtcw.zonegames.co.uk:27960*

PASSWORD: **noodle**

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our Free-For-All Server is simple. If *Counter-Strike* wins the vote, open the *Half-Life* console and type password *pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect ffa.zonegames. co.uk* and press enter. You will be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering *ffa.zonegames.co.uk* where you would normally provide an IP address. If you experience any problems connecting on the night of the Free-For-All then check our forum at www.pczone.co.uk as we may be running a non-*Counter-Strike* server with different connection details, depending on how the voting goes.

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL GIVES YOU THE LOWDOWN ON ALL TOMORROW'S LAN PARTIES

Like any respectable forum topic, the title says it all. With a choice of seven LAN parties at locations all across the country, you should be able to get to one of these.

■ www.birminglan.co.uk hold monthly events for 20 people and the day costs £6.
■ www.multiplay.co.uk will be staging i14 on November 15-17 at Newbury racecourse. There's space for up to 1,000 people so you may still get a place. We'll

be there too, so come on down and meet the *PC ZONE* team.
■ www.gamehedz.net on November 16-17 costs £25, and will take place in the Barnsley area.
■ www.hglan.co.uk is on November 22-24 in London's Mile End, with places available for up to 26 people.
■ www.gaming.clanaos.co.uk if you like your *Half-Life* mods.
■ www.trfg.co.uk is on December 7-8 in Shrewsbury. Cost: £15.

■ http://g2002.bash.sh will take place on December 14-16. Check out what's happening at this annual event in a (not so) Secret Nuclear Bunker in Brentwood, Essex. It costs £40 but this one's pretty unique, so don't miss out.

If you want to get your LAN mentioned, send beer, bribes and details to stevie@arsenalfc.net. Don't forget it's best to give me a couple of months' notice if you can. Till next time, Scalper out.

MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ **HOLDING COURT** Dave Woods

MERRY BLOODY CHRISTMAS

After reading your last issue I've come to the conclusion that the best thing I can hope for this Christmas is a cold. Every month I buy your magazine, every day I visit your website, and all I'm reading about is games that have slipped. Christmas falls in December, not January, February, March... *Unreal 2*, *Doom III*, *Tomb Raider* and *Command & Conquer*, to name but a few, are all now next-year releases. The only real gem to look forward to is *Splinter Cell*, and I've got a bad feeling that this is going to go as well.

I know that if a title needs work, then the work's got to be done – no one wants to buy buggy software – but that doesn't get round the fact that Christmas 2002 is going to be a very empty one for PC gamers. Can you give us some idea of what titles are still going to hit so we can have something to put on our letter to Santa?
Paul Boland

Uncanny. *Splinter Cell* has indeed slipped by the wayside, the latest release date is January 31. If you want something more solid then

Splinter Cell: coming soon, or so we hope.

just take a look at our review section this month. The real biggies might have slipped but there's still plenty to keep you going...

PLEASURE/PAIN

Joy: First copy of *PC ZONE* arrived today.
Misery: Haven't time to start reading it.
Joy: Weekend here, time to read the magazine.
Misery: So much to read, so little time.
Joy: Lots of game reviews, not many adverts.
Misery: Which game to choose?
Joy: *Prisoner Of War* sounds like it's great.
Misery: Have only got 8Mb on video card.
Joy: Write to *PC ZONE* and win video card with 128Mb!
Misery: Write to *PC ZONE* and not win video card!
Joy or Misery???
I Palfrey

Misery.

FETA CHEESE

Just what did the Greek Government think it was up to? I read your report last issue and was pissing myself laughing at the thought of Greek people being dragged off to jail for playing their GBAs on the beach, but there is a serious point behind it all. The law might have been repealed or changed or whatever but how did something

so absurd get passed in the first place. Mistakes can be made, but when you're talking about the law of a country you'd think there'd have to be some checks to stop crazed individuals passing laws willy-nilly. What if Tony Blair had an aversion to bananas and whipped through a law that resulted in a jail sentence if you got caught eating one. If I lived in Greece I'd be seriously scared about the future.

It's a crazy, crazy world.

YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU!

I was reading your broadband article and was surprised that you didn't mention BT's registration process for providing broadband in

rural areas. Basically, when enough people sign up, BT starts the process of upgrading the exchange.

Something like 40 per cent of us are stuck in rural areas without broadband and precious little hope of ever getting it unless enough people pre-register – and this simply isn't happening. Of the hundreds of exchanges with triggers set only a handful have reached them. For people such as me with a village exchange that doesn't even have a trigger level set, this is infuriating. We won't even get a trigger level unless the local towns meet their triggers, even though a small local campaign has got 70 people registered for my exchange. Here's my idea. Even if you don't want broadband, register anyway.

Do you live in the sticks and want a phat pipe plugged into the back of your head? Then register with BT now – go, go, go!
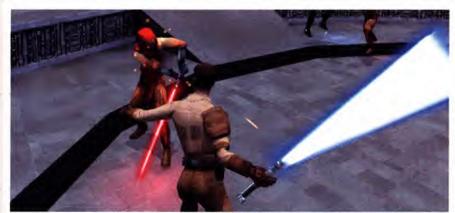
Steve Hill shortly before he got chased away from the Greek Embassy for protesting too vigorously.

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4400 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.

> ## "Even if you don't want broadband, register anyway. You're not actually promising BT that you'll pay for it"
>
> **CRARCH**
> ON HOW TO CON BT INTO INVESTING MORE IN THE SERVICE

Jedi Knight II: a classic shooter, especially when you unlock the lightsaber.

You're not actually promising BT that you'll pay for it. So just do it – www.bt.com/broadband.
Crarch
What are you waiting for?

A CLASSIC MISTAKE
I was about to take issue with your use of the word 'classic' as the highest accolade available for a reviewed game, but a quick look at my pocket dictionary has enlightened me. There I was thinking you'd gone soft, when all the time you've actually been broadening our understanding of the English language.

What the hell am I talking about? It seems your otherwise vigorous powers of criticism desert you as soon as a game offers you a gun from a first-person perspective. While strategy, role-playing and action-adventures get the sharp analysis they deserve and the harsh score to go with it, first-person shooters as ordinary as *Jedi Knight II*, *Soldier Of Fortune II* or *Aliens Versus Predator 2* (a lot of sequels there, aren't there?) all get labelled as enduring, timeless titles of acknowledged excellence. Or that's what I thought. In actual fact, you've deviously been using the word 'classic' in one of its secondary meanings, listed in the dictionary as 'remarkably typical'. Which is what all those games are.

You have a weapon, you have a level with doors, you shoot anything that gets in your way as you move through

them. The graphics might be getting closer to photorealistic quality all the time, but it seems gameplay is stuck in the Cro-Magnon stage of evolution. Which is why your edifying linguistic usage is to be applauded. Bravo!
Ben Compson

Have you played all these games then? Or are you a strategy fan angry that *Sudden Strike 2* wasn't awarded 97 per cent. The PC excels at first-person shooters, and there are developers around who have been honing their art for years. I'd still play any of the three games that you mention in your letter and that's the mark of a true classic, although I'd take issue with your remark that they're all the same. *AvP2* thrives on suspense and *Jedi Knight II* has a fantastic third-person mode. *Soldier Of Fortune 2* is probably the only straight shooter there, and we awarded it a Classic because of the level design and the AI.

SECRET SQUIRREL
Out of curiosity, what's with the blind squirrel hanging out on a branch in your *Splinter Cell* preview last issue? Has it got a new job as the latest stealth action hero, or has it just gone on a walk and got a bit lost? Whatever it's doing, you've got a brave squirrel there – you could

make a bit of money out of that guy if you use his talents well.
Tom Lee

He wasn't content with his lot in Watchdog and threatened to walk unless we gave him a few games to play with.

HYPER-REAL
The past evades us, the present envelopes us and the future is blurry, as far as games go. Where are we going to go in the future? What is the industry's next big curve going to be? Look at games such as *Unreal 2* and *Doom III*. They are so real they make you feel as though you're part of a living, breathing world – but that's where it stops. We've run into the wall of reality and don't seem to know where to go without crossing it. What I'm asking is, in the future will games be fully interactive, with voice sensors that can determine everything down to our tone? Or how about holographic imaging, making the world appear around you as opposed to on your television? Only time will tell.
Joshua McMullene

Indeed.

GOOD CALL
Bravo! I applaud your innate ability to predict the future. Way back at the start of the year your January issue declared that 2002 would be the Year of The PC. I showed this article to my PS2-loving friends and they just

MAFIA
PC ZONE ISSUE 119 – 92%

We said… Despite the flaws, *Mafia* has a special quality that means when you're involved in one of the missions you don't care about anything else."

What makes *Mafia* so great? Not the freedom you have to explore the vast city, (which should really be credited to *GTA III*, as it came first), or the perfect blend of driving, shooting and adventure, but the strong, well-written story, told through cut-scenes during the various missions. The characters have their own personalities and emotions, and a massive amount of work has gone into the character animation, which can't be faulted.

The music is superb, and the voice-acting is a relief after the usual muck found in computer games. The locations are extremely detailed and the graphics are some of the most realistic I've ever seen.

The missions are superb as well. One minute you're chasing a mob boss through five o'clock traffic or shooting a plane down from the window of your car, and the next you're walking your girlfriend home, or driving your boss to lunch as his personal bodyguard. The game is really difficult though, mainly because you can only save after completing a mission.

What makes the game a classic? The AI of the enemy characters, the way the cut-scenes are directed and all those little details you forget about. If you're a fan of driving games, shooting games or films about gangsters, I urge you to go buy this game now. *Mafia* is brilliant and a real candidate for Game of the Year.

Haldane McFall
SCORE: 96%

laughed. Then I showed them *GTA III* running on my PC. "Wow, it's like, ten times better!" one of them shouted as he drove over a pensioner. They've all now

upgraded their PCs. Hail *PC ZONE*, the gaming magazine that foretells the future. Mr Korda has been screaming at the top of his lungs how this year would be

Let's try again. 2003 is going to be the Year of The... PC. *Doom III* anyone?

the year of the PC every month. It's good to see that at least one PC magazine knows what it's talking about.

Kevin Mackay

And it's only going to get better. The imminent release of DirectX9 is going to propel the PC even further forward.

TOILET HUMOUR

Dear Sir,

There seems to be a problem with some of the shooters I've been buying lately. If I fork out 35 quid on a game, I don't think it's too much to ask that some of the foundations of the modern gaming experience ship with the final product. To this end, I expect the following:

- To be able to visit toilets. Male and female ones. I would also expect more often than not to be able to use both the flushing mechanism and the hand-dryer.
- To 'interrupt' a bad guy in a toilet cubicle. Sometimes he'll be in his pants.
- To trawl through a sewer.
- To visit a subway. This may or may not be abandoned.
- To overhear bad guys discussing me.
- To be able to shoot dogs.
- To visit a sparsely populated bar/nightclub.
- To be able to look at digitised photos of programmers or their wives/girlfriends/children in photo frames.
- To have to endure a tortuous underwater level where I'm constantly scrabbling for air. And getting nibbled at by piranha.
- Most importantly: To get captured approximately halfway through and lose all my weapons.

Some shooters are showing a flagrant disregard for this kind of tradition and it's unacceptable. Kindly rectify.

Dan Marshall

Does your shooter let you go to the toilet? If not, take it back to the shop and demand a refund.

GE-BORES

I've read your mag for a few years and have come to rely on your honest, unbiased reviews. However, I've noticed an alarming trend, which you need to nip in the bud – your obsession with GeForce cards and the fact that you seem to completely ignore other makes. My point is: for the sake of a free market and giving good honest hardware reviews take off your GeForce matching tops-and-trouser sets and try to control the urge to unzip your flies every time the word GeForce is mentioned. You need to just take a step back to see the big picture – as you slowly break it to the GeForce 4 box that you sleep next to at night that you may have to cool things down a bit.

Pete Griller

The new Radeon 9700 is the fastest card, but it's not cheap. And even though it's at the top of our Buyer's Guide, we still think the GeForce 4 is the best buy pound-for-pound. We review every bit of hardware in the same way, and use our benchmarks to let you know which is the best. We're not saying the GeForce will be king forever, but there's no point us recommending something that's not as good. [PCZ]

If you've got the cash buy the Radeon 9700 – it's the fastest card. Mere mortals will have to settle for a GeForce 4. Not that that's a bad thing...

READER REVIEWS

▲ **GTA III**
PC ZONE ISSUE – 117 95%

We said... "Finding fault with a game like this is akin to bedding Kylie Minogue and complaining that you got a pube stuck between your teeth afterwards."
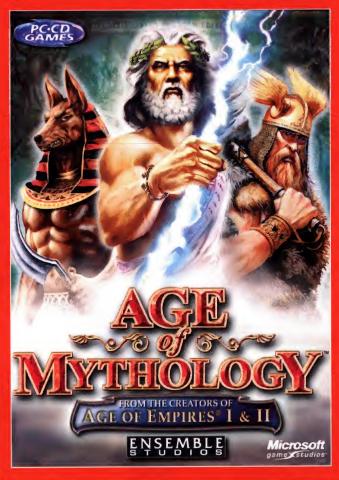

Why did I get caught up in the hype surrounding this game and buy it as soon as it was released? Then again, if I'd waited and read your glowing review I'd still have got it and still be cursing my wasted £30. The game is an uncontrollable joke. Driving a car is a random game of skittles and the top-down view doesn't zoom out far enough to be playable. When the cops chase you they 'skillfully' drive at you without a care for themselves. The programmers seem to have given the other characters a simple path to follow and no element of any logic in following it or achieving a goal.

On the subject of AI; the citizens of the three cities are only there for novelty value as they amble about, bumping into each other constantly and muttering: "Ma mothers ma sister." Are there no other phrases available? The slowdown issues have been done to death, but I don't expect to have to run it at 800 x 600 with 16-bit colour on a 1.6Ghz, with 512RAM and a Radeon 8500.

Credit where credit's due though, the scope of the cities are good and the freedom available is a step forward. Overall *GTA III* is a good idea, poorly executed and hastily packaged. The best (or worst) example of hype selling a substandard product in many years. Please *Doom III*... Don't go down the same path!

Kevin Payne
VERDICT: 62%

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDAL OF HONOR

It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.
PUB EA **DEV** 2015
PCZ ISSUE 112

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.
PUB Activision
DEV Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120

NEW ENTRY NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
The best single-player shooter only makes number two in the A-List, just losing out to *Medal Of Honor*'s multiplayer mode. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 122**

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS
Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ ISSUE 71**

NEW ENTRY UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Digital Extremes **PCZ ISSUE 122**

MAFIA
From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion **PCZ ISSUE 119**

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.
PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II
The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game cowering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.
PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ ISSUE 118**

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 110**

BATTLEFIELD 1942
Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must have for any online shooter fan.
PUB EA **DEV** Digital Illusions **PCZ ISSUE 121**

MAX PAYNE
It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Remedy **PCZ ISSUE 107**

WARRIOR KINGS
A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.
PUB Microids **DEV** Black Cactus **PCZ ISSUE 114**

COMMANDOS 2
There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio **PCZ ISSUE 108**

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS
There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.
PUB CDV **DEV** GSC Gameworld **PCZ ISSUE 101**

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS
Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb and, as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.
PUB EON **DEV** Bitmap Brothers **PCZ ISSUE 101**

ETHERLORDS
This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.
PUB JoWooD **DEV** Nival Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 112**

WARCRAFT III
While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 119**

BATTLE REALMS
Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.
PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Liquid Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 111**

AOEII: GOLD EDITION
It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII* the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single and multiplayer campaigns. A great RTS.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ ISSUE 84**

SUDDEN STRIKE
Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.
PUB CDV **DEV** Fireglow **PCZ ISSUE 96**

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

◄ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ►

DEUS EX

Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.
PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 118**

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**

DUNGEON SIEGE
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**

BALDUR'S GATE II
The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**

DIVINE DIVINITY
This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.
PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios **PCZ ISSUE 121**

FREEDOM FORCE
Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and beardy of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

NEW ENTRY ARX FATALIS
This is a graphically beautifully role-playing game with more than a few hints of *Ultima Underworld*. Its hugely detailed and realistic environment made this a *PC ZONE* Essential.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 122**

◄ ACTION/ADVENTURE ►

GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71

SOUL REAVER 2
While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**

DISCWORLD NOIR
Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**

THE THING
Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Computer Artworks **PCZ ISSUE 121**

PRISONER OF WAR
One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Wide Games **PCZ ISSUE 121**

HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN
The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superbly realistic AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.
PUB Eidos **DEV** IO **PCZ ISSUE 121**

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS
Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Rebel Act Studios **PCZ ISSUE 98**

PROJECT EDEN
Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Core Design **PCZ ISSUE 107**

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE
LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 84**

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 98**

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE

Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.
PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III
Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

THE SIMS
Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87

CAESAR III
Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail *Caesar*.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70

SIMCITY 3000
Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *SimCity* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 74

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM
This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay over 50 missions, spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll also have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON
Design and build your own theme park and then pack it full of the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up, while trying to keep the cash and the punters coming in. From rickety wooden dippers to *Nemesis*-style, white-knuckle gurners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Chris Sawyer
PCZ ISSUE 75

MONOPOLY TYCOON
This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park*/*SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 110

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.
PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

CALL TO POWER II
It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.
PUB Activision **DEV** Activision
PCZ ISSUE 98

◀ SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02

Another year, another update and yet another improvement on the greatest sports management game of all time, one that will literally consume your life. New features this time around include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats, and all of the new rules and regulations imposed by FIFA for the new season. Pure genius.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 108

VIRTUA TENNIS
Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software
PCZ ISSUE 114

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3
This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.
PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 98

VIRTUAL POOL 3
Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you clearing up in no time.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Celeris
PCZ ISSUE 99

NEW ENTRY FIFA 2003
This latest offering in the *FIFA* series seems to have been influenced by *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. *FIFA 2003*'s immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC.
PUB Electronic Arts **DEV** EA Sports
PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Rockstar
PCZ ISSUE 117

GRAND PRIX 4
You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Simergy
PCZ ISSUE 119

COLIN MCRAE 2.0
This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cards handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters
PCZ ISSUE 110

CRAZY TAXI
One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-yer-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old fashioned insanity.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite
PCZ ISSUE 119

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2
Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a belter, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Angel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 96

IL-2 STURMOVIK

Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.
PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games
PCZ ISSUE 110

MS FLIGHT SIM 2002
With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** BAO
PCZ ISSUE 111

BATTLE OF BRITAIN
Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software
PCZ ISSUE 103

FALCON 4
We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Microprose
PCZ ISSUE 72

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH
B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Wayward Simulations
PCZ ISSUE 96

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 104

GHOST RECON
A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.
PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Red Storm Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 110

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE
This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 115

HOSTILE WATERS
A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.
PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software
PCZ ISSUE 101

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO
This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios
PCZ ISSUE 95

PC ZONE'S MOD MAN TONY LAMB RAKES THROUGH HIS GAMING PAST TO BRING YOU HIS TOP TEN GAMING CLASSICS

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT (PC)
The shooter that finally knocked the likes of *Half-Life*, *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III* off their perch. The Normandy landing recreation is harrowing and sticks out as a particular memory of this game, but the overall quality is outstanding with fiendish enemy AI and great levels throughout. Spielberg eat your heart out.

ELITE (BBC MICRO)
Confession time. The flu I developed when this space-travelling, trading and battling epic came out was faked – I pretended to be ill so I could stay off school and play it. After a week I was ranked 'Elite' and I think my Mum suspected something. If she or my old Headmaster are reading this, I'm very, very sorry.

DOOM (PC)
Everyone mentions it, but how can you not? *Doom* revolutionised PC gaming – it looked fantastic, it had real atmosphere, it was in 3D (wow) and they gave away the first episode free (double-wow). We'd enjoyed *Wolfenstein*, but this was a whole new ballgame. It was also my introduction to Deathmatch, courtesy of the Wandy network. Happy days.

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC (PC)
Yes it's a mod, but then I'm a mod reviewer and I've had so many happy hours with this game that it has be right up there in my top ten. I've been playing it since it first appeared and it's only now that its popularity is waning – pretty good going really. I've never been able to get into *Counter-Strike* so I stick to *Team Fortress Classic*.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2 (PC)
Not the best looking FPS ever, and multiplayer never quite worked, but so far it's the only game that genuinely scared the hell out of me. You have to turn the lights off to be able to see the action on the screen and when you do you'll be scared sh*tless. I think I managed an hour in one go just the once.

GRAN TURISMO (PSONE)
When the PSone and N64 were battling for supremacy, this was the game that really showed what Sony's little grey box could do. Even if you weren't a driving fanatic you had to look at this one with respect. I still have fond memories of my 900bhp Mitsubishi GTO thrashing everything in sight. Petrolhead heaven.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD II (ARCADE)
I completed this on holiday a few years ago and spent a fortune doing so, but I had a blast along the way. My trigger finger needed traction for a couple of weeks afterwards, and waking up screaming about the undead and shortages of ammo took some explaining to the wife, but it was worth it. The definitive stand-up blaster.

GODS (AMIGA)
I'm not really a fan of platformers, so it was a toss-up between *Gods* on the Amiga or *Chuckie Egg* on my BBC… damn, tough decision. *Gods* wins, but only because I played *Chuckie Egg* so much I got sick of it. This Bitmap Brothers outing was compulsive and strangely enough I suddenly want to try it again.
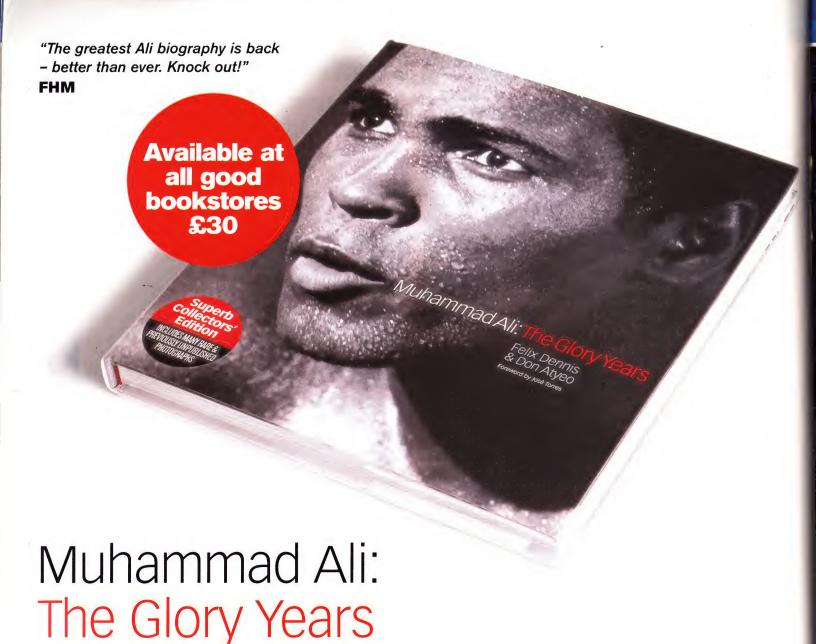
RAMPART (PC)
So simple and yet so incredibly frustrating. Two players, two castles, some cannons and a frantic battle to knock down the opposition's stronghold and prevent it being rebuilt. As the game progresses, repair gets more and more difficult and tempers get more and more frayed. It'll work on anything and it's a freebie nowadays, I think.

HOT-ROD (ARCADE)
1987. Me, Wandy and a couple of mates piling into anyone's car that had petrol in it, heading off to Southend and standing around this game for hours. Four players each had a steering wheel to control their little car as it made its way around the courses. You got money for your score and could upgrade your car with loads of goodies. Great fun.

RETRO ZONE

YOUR REGULAR DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA

Laser Squad only came with three maps, but there were also expansion packs.

"What would have been *Laser Squad* 2 ended up as *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, the first in the *X–Com* trilogy"

THE SPECTRUM was a dying machine. From the west the 16-bit STs and Amigas were crushing all before them, with their 256 colours and multichannel sound. From the east came a new wave of dedicated games consoles that would propel gaming from the spotty backwaters to the glitzy mainstream. But the British Spectrum still had a few tricks to offer, and with *Laser Squad* the humble Spec' found itself a late and lasting champion, one that along with such hallowed classics as *Knight Lore* and *Manic Miner*, would

LASER SQUAD

X–Com may be dead, but the old spectrum classic lives on

ensure some semblance of immortality after the machine's inevitable passing.

Developer Target games, which was made up of Julian and Nick Gollop, had previously laid the foundations for *Laser Squad*'s tactical turn-based gameplay with the £1.99 wonder *Rebelstar*. The formula was simple; pick a side, spend your credits on armour, deploy your

troops then, using action points to move your squad, camp choke points and set up deadly crossfires. Westwood is credited with inventing real-time strategy, but the Gollops were and still are very much the godfathers of tactical strategy.

Despite its success, a sequel was not to be at that time. After C64 and Amstrad versions, ports to PC, Amiga and Atari ST followed and what would have been *Laser Squad 2* ended up as *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, the first in the *X–Com* trilogy. It would be another 14 years before *Laser Squad*'s return in the form of *Laser Squad Nemesis*, which, in line with one of the original's great strengths (and, ironically *X–Com*'s weakness) was conceived as a pure multiplayer game. Released in January 2002, it has since established itself as one of the simplest and best strategy games on the Net.

With single-player, massively multiplayer and maybe even handheld versions on the way, *Laser Squad* may yet go on to eclipse the success of its successor. Long live *Laser Squad*. Long live the Spec… (*Enough – Ed*).

Equip your troops, but don't worry about ammo, just rifle the dead.

Moonbase Assault – what a *Counter-Strike* level that would be…

THE BEST OF THE REST →

PETER BEARDSLEY'S INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL
(Spectrum)
Before publishers decided to licence entire football divisions, they were content to sign up a single footballer. But for all his undeniable skill, Beards wasn't the most charismatic of players to front a post-match interview. Unfortunately, the game that bore his name managed to capture his looks and personality, but it failed to transfer any of his footballing dexterity. In a word, muck.

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS
(Spectrum/C64 – unreleased)
One of the more obvious omissions from Stuart Campbell's Lost And Found feature a couple of months back, *The Great Giana Sisters* was given a rave review by ex-*ZONE* writer Duncan McDonald (himself now lost) in *Your Sinclair*. The game never materialised. Nintendo took exception to the fact that 'the greatest platform game of all time' looked remarkably like *Super Mario Brothers*.
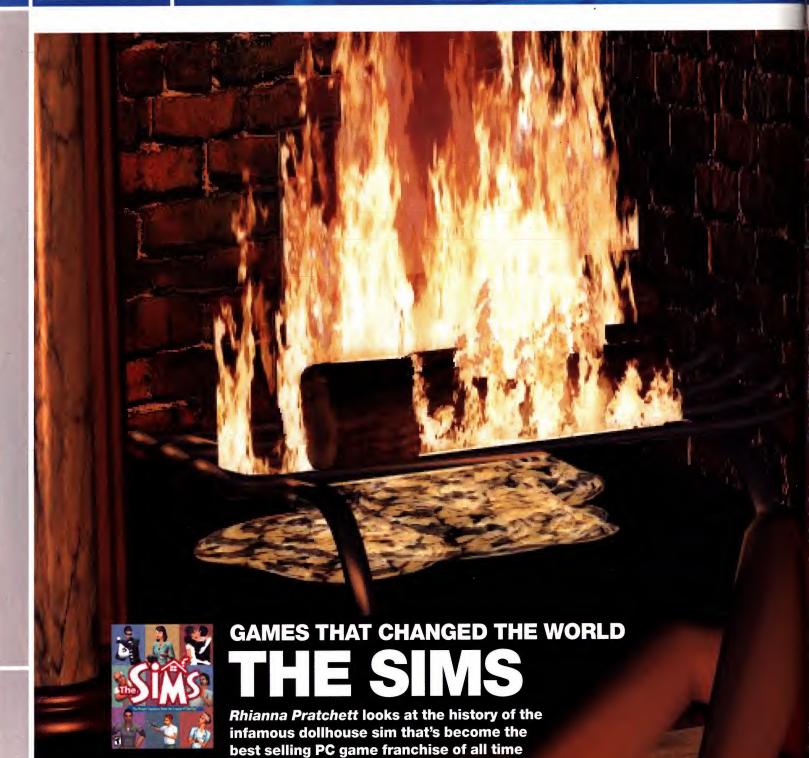

BARD'S TALE III: THIEF OF FATE
(C64, Atari ST, Amiga, PC)
When it came to RPGs on the PC, the *Ultima* series was tops. Nudged into second place however was the *Bard's Tale* trilogy, of which this was unfortunately the last. However, the original's designer had moved on after numero *deux*, and with a storyline that involved travelling through time, it perhaps wasn't so surprising the series reached a premature end.

MAD MIX
(C64, Spectrum)
Every so often the world goes retro mad, except us, as we are permanently avec rose-tinted specs when it comes to computer games. Anyway, 1988 saw the first recorded case of retro-itis, with *Breakout* and *Pac-Man* clones appearing with frightening regularity. *Mad Mix* was one of the latter and really rather good it was too, despite the tenuous Pepsi license.

GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD
THE SIMS

Rhianna Pratchett **looks at the history of the infamous dollhouse sim that's become the best selling PC game franchise of all time**

GAME The Sims
DEVELOPER Maxis
RELEASED 2000
INFLUENCED Umpteen other Sim prefixed titles and a few social interaction games

PROFILE

NAME Patrick Barrett
ROLE ON SIMS Software and object engineer
NOW DOING Working as a designer on more *Sims* titles.

NAME Tim LeTourneau
ROLE ON SIMS Associate producer
NOW DOING Producer at Maxis, working on other *Sims* projects

NAME Will Wright
ROLE ON SIMS Project leader
NOW DOING Overseeing the running of Maxis

'GAMES THAT Changed The World' is a multi-faceted term. There are the games that change your own world, and if you look at the A-List and our All-Time Classics, you'll find us waxing lyrical about our own favourites. Then there are the games that influenced a generation of other games, which is what many of the titles we've covered on these pages have done. Finally, there are games like *The Sims* that changed the nature of interactive entertainment, reshaping it and influencing how gaming is seen by the world.

THE ARCHITECTURAL DREAM

Maxis' founder Will Wright, is the father of all things *Sim*. And if you're talking games that changed the world, you need look no further than his CV. Starting with *SimCity* in 1989, he has gone on to build a world-conquering empire of *Sim*-related titles. But his greatest success by far came about almost by accident. Wright has always been known as a developer with one foot in gaming and the other in the realm of academia. When he came up with the concept for *SimCity* he based it around his readings on urban growth, written by the American technology professor Jay Forrester. Similarly with *The Sims*, Wright was influenced by the work of Christopher Alexander who wrote about the functional value of architecture. "I always wanted to do a game involving architecture," Wright explained in one interview. "*The Sims* has lots of design symmetry to the ideas of *SimCity* – you must look at traffic patterns in a house, land use and pollution."

In fact, during most of its development *The Sims* was still very much the game about architecture that Wright envisaged. When the actual sim people were introduced they were only intended to be a feedback mechanism to show players how well they'd built the house. "Will pushed it as an architecture game and to this day *The Sims* really is still that architecture game," claims Patrick Barrett, one of the original software engineers on *The Sims*. "But explaining to executives that it's all about architecture was very difficult, so we started pushing it as a people simulator. We put a lot of work into the people and we added a lot more objects. The executives understood the 'people game' idea a little better but they still didn't think we could do it."

A TROUBLED BIRTH

The development of *The Sims* was a turbulent process, and any anti-*Sims* gamers out there will be banging your heads against a wall in frustration when you hear that *The Sims* was nearly canned on several occasions during its

"The toilet was always on the cut list and we kept fighting that one. They wanted it to be like *The Brady Bunch*"

lengthy seven-year development, according to Tim LeTourneau, associate producer on *The Sims*. "Maxis, before they were purchased by EA wanted to kill *The Sims*. EA wanted to kill *The Sims* on a number of occasions and even we wondered who's going to play this game? Who's going to tell these little people to go to the bathroom? Even today it's very hard to describe *The Sims* to someone. It's very much a game you need to experience, because until you sit down and play with it it's hard to see what the appeal is."

It's easy to imagine the weight of working on a game that was constantly under threat from all quarters. Tim admits many of the team working on *The Sims* didn't believe in it during its development. "At the point I joined, which was towards the end of the development cycle, I believed it was going to ship. Did I believe it was going to be such a success? No. No way. There was no way you could guess that it might be popular and quirky."

But Patrick, who joined the team earlier on, is more adamant about his belief in the potential of the game. "I knew it was going to be big, I kept telling them every day. It was very addictive and I hadn't felt that since *SimCity 2000*. I thought that the big challenge was going to be getting people to try the game."

TOILET TRAINING
One of the reasons people didn't really 'get' *The Sims*, was the fact there was very little out there to compare it to. Activision's 1985 *Little Computer People* for the C64 (see last month's Retro Zone) was a possible reference point, but how many remember that technologically stunted example? Even eight years later, when Maxis first started working on *The Sims,* it was still a big problem, and it took a long time before technology was capable of making it believable. "What's important about *The Sims* is the people, and if you couldn't believe that they were people it

A relaxing neck massage or a spot of spouse strangling?

Don't want to get your hands dirty? Hire a gardener.

wasn't going to work," explains Patrick. "To do that we had to do something in a sprite game that hadn't been done before. The people had to be in 3D. So we put 3D characters in a sprite world and we couldn't use hardware acceleration for that. Even though 3D acceleration was coming out, it didn't help us."

Little Computer People also didn't have to worry about the pitfalls of putting social interaction into the game, which was one of the most difficult problems in *The Sims*. "We had lots of issues to do with the social interactions to deal with. One of the first animations was the slap and when two guys slapped each other

it was quite humourous, but when a guy slapped his wife it was spouse abuse and we've had to deal with issues like this all the time. The other standout feature was the toilet. The toilet was always on the cut list and we kept fighting that one. They wanted it like *The Brady Bunch* where there is no toilet!"

HOT HOT HOT
It was these same social interactions and the often unpredictable nature of how they occurred in the game that made it great fun to develop, according to Tim. "In *Hot Date* we'd done a grovel animation, and in the game you can rotate around to look at

the characters from any direction. During the animation the girl goes down on her knees in front of the guy and clasps her hands and shakes them. Except that one of the first times we saw it, we viewed it from the back of the guy and you can imagine what it looked like! We laughed so much during the development of *The Sims* because of goofy stuff like that."

But surprisingly, it's this sense of unintentional humour surrounding the activities of the sim people that has gone on to prove to be one of the most enduring features of the game. "*The Sims* is funny, because it's like real life and we laugh at the irony of it, muses Tim. "One of the funniest moments I've ever had on *The Sims* was with *On Holiday*, when a sim was walking around with a metal detector and stopped right in front of the portable toilets and started digging. We didn't script that, it wasn't planned, it was pure irony that they did it and I laughed out loud, not because someone making the game told me to laugh, I laughed at the ridiculousness of them and their environment and the way they interacted."

Some of the funniest moments during development came from the bugs in the game, especially when the animations were being mis-registered. The most recent expansion pack *Sims Unleashed*, which introduced pets, brought with it some of the most unusual looking development bugs. When the pets initially went into the game they were based around the same code as the people, so inevitably they would start doing the same actions as the sims would. This meant they would float in the air chopping vegetables on the kitchen counter, put fires out,

THE FUTURE OF THE SIMS

THE SCENE IS SET FOR A BIT OF ONLINE DATING

With the fifth expansion pack flying off the shelves, a port to PlayStation 2 in the works, and the fact that *The Sims* titles occupy at least one or two spots in the PC charts at any one time, *The Sims* are here to stay. The next project in the works is *The Sims Online*, currently scheduled for a Christmas 2002 release. In this particular *Sims* incarnation you take control of a sim directly and explore a huge online world, making friends, earning cash, going on dates and getting married. The ideal dating game for the mentally troubled and physically scarred. After that, well Maxis, are pretty cagey about what's coming after that, but the smart money would be on the developers creating a new set of building blocks with which to launch the second wave of world *Sims* domination. *The Sims In 3D*? Watch this space.

The Sims are going online, but is the world ready?

A computer surrounded by piles of rotting food. Sound familiar?

A Lego lover's paradise, and no danger of losing the pieces.

Who ordered the strippergrams?

chat up sim people, ride snowboards and even scrub their underarms in the hot tub.

SIMS ARE GO
The Sims game eventually worked through its developing hiccups and finally got its release in 2000. While the expansion packs don't generally receive big scores in the UK gaming press the original game elicited widespread praise. *PC ZONE*'s Mark Hill even went so far as to say: "To miss out on *The Sims* would be to miss out on one of the most significant steps forward PC games have ever witnessed." Two years and four expansion packs later, it was a very different *Sim*-weary Mr Hill who said in his *The Sims: On Holiday* review: "Nothing would surprise us as the relentless money-making machine continues to paint the charts grey, with add-on after add-on."

Therein lies the paradox with *The Sims* franchise, namely that it seems to be vehemently hated by most hardcore gamers, and yet it has sold more units (over 17 million) than any other gaming franchise. So who's buying them and why?

"I think it's a wide group of people," says Tim. "There isn't one way to play the game, there isn't one way to go, there isn't one type of house to design. There's not one type of *Sims* player, there are lots, and we hope to continue to support all those people with each of the expansion packs and the growth of the franchise."

But Will Wright has his own opinions about who's buying *The Sims*. "I think the largest impact *The Sims* has had on the gaming world is to bring a whole new species into gaming as potential customers, the females. The fact we can now sell games to roughly twice as many players and the fact that these new players aren't all adrenaline junkies is going to profoundly change our industry at some point."

But why do the developers think *The Sims* gets such a negative response from hardcore gamers? "Hardcore gamers in general don't like anything that the greater population like," argues Tim. "They set themselves up as the niche; they're the hardcore. The original *Sims*, was made for hardcore gamers. It absolutely was, there's no question about it."

"It has a lot to do with the popularity of the game," continues Patrick. "If Microsoft wasn't so successful people wouldn't hate Microsoft, it's fun hating them because they're at the top and it's the same with *The Sims*. There are a lot of games out there that deserve the backlash more than *The Sims*."

THE SIMS: EXPANDED
And let's look at those expansion packs for a minute. In the past two years *The Sims* has produced no less than five expansion packs, of varying quality and value – *Livin' Large*, *House Party*, *Hot Date*, *On Holiday* and *Unleashed*. A tad excessive? Perhaps. Milking the preverbial cash cow? Definitely, but then who could blame them, when presented with a guaranteed swimming pool full of money?

"I've got to say in general the US gaming press has been very generous with their reviews of the expansion packs," claims Tim, even though this hasn't always been the case in the UK. "Understandably it's something they should be incredibly critical on, but we've still continued to get good reviews on the expansion packs, even though there's a lot of people that would like to see us just tank." Much of the criticism that gets levelled at the expansions seems to revolve around the fact that they don't really do anything new,

it's basically the same game with a few added extras, which, let's face it, a number of expansion packs for other games have been guilty of in the past.
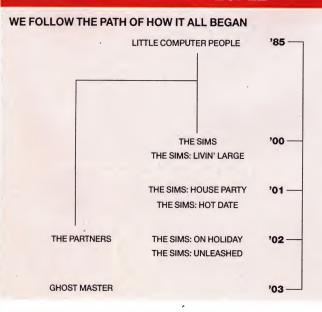
"We can't let the expansion packs make it completely new, because they tie to the original game and we can't change the way the original works," explains Tim in defence of such criticism. "It's not like mission discs for other games. It all connects back to what the original was and we don't do this lightly, we understand the importance of making every one of them something that delivers on the core premise of what *The Sims* was to begin with. I still believe there are a lot of hardcore gamers that buy the expansion packs, it's just not cool to say you do."

SIM WORLD
Despite the negativity from some quarters, no one sells 17 million games by accident and much of the success of the franchise can be put down to Maxis' belief in the importance of community and online support. While the majority of the appeal might initially be playing through the official expansion packs, there's a flourishing online community who spend their time swapping furniture and skins, or debating the merits of the latest expansion pack, which undoubtedly contributes to the longevity of the game.

Will Wright says: "I never in my wildest dreams thought *The Sims* would achieve the level of success it has. I attribute most of its success to the players. I think we designed a game that would normally sell a million copies. The next six million in sales I think were due to the community support for the game by players (fan sites, custom skins, stories, etc)." *The Sims* has not only helped redefine strategy games, but it also helped gaming become more accessible to a wider audience, which is perhaps its greatest achievement. [PZ]

THE LIFE OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE
WE FOLLOW THE PATH OF HOW IT ALL BEGAN

	LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE	'85
	THE SIMS	'00
	THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE	
	THE SIMS: HOUSE PARTY	'01
	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	
THE PARTNERS	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	'02
	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	
GHOST MASTER		'03

COMMENT

**Are you sitting comfortably children?
Then *Paul Presley* will begin...**

LIFE IS all about stories. Here's one. Once upon a time there was a games industry that wanted to be taken seriously. All its friends – the movie and television industry, the music business, the theatre and literary worlds and even artists who made pictures out of horseshit and cut sheep in half – were treated with respect by the general public.

But the poor old games industry was shunned by the public. 'You're not

"The moral of the story? If you want to be taken seriously you need to listen to the people with the creative talent"

Ooh! Look a woman's bottom! Watch where you're pointing that thing.

serious,' it said with scorn, 'you're the stuff of children. Toys for immature boys. Plus you smell bad and haven't shaved.' But while the games industry conceded that sleepless nights sat in front of burning cathode ray tubes had left its personal hygiene in a terrible state, the hundreds of games that it produced each year certainly weren't all for kids.

"What about *GTA III* or *Mafia* or *Deus Ex* or *Black & White* or *The Sims* or..." they cried, but the public wasn't listening because, although the games industry had a valid point in asserting that games were a vibrant and stimulation medium that millions of grown-ups across the world were enjoying, the pleas came from the developers themselves and everybody knows that developers live in dark rooms and can't be seen by ordinary people.

Instead the public's view of the games industry was painted by men in expensive suits whose cars were made from cocaine and whose brains were guided by the pursuit of a single goal – money – which left no room for the sort of imaginative thinking required to actually make games into a driving creative force that would command respect.

But for some reason, mostly financial, these men in suits controlled the developers' actions, commanding them to change their dramatically rich games ideas into stories about terrorists stealing nukes because that's what the public likes and they should know since they've slept with the female half of it and developers are in awe of anyone that has seen a woman's bottom.
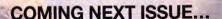
But even the men in suits agreed, that a larger audience means a larger bag of money to take to the girls at Spearmint Rhino every night. So they set about trying to make the public think that *Counter-Strike* could be as rewarding as *The Corrections,* but sadly failed to recognise the right way of doing this.

And instead of buying the developers some shaving kits and letting them flex their creativity to the full, the men in suits deduced that the way forward would be to produce big budget, movie style games that would make everyone sit up and pay attention and bring in the money.

But it didn't (and they didn't) because what the suits didn't recognise is that the real talent behind the movies are the scriptwriters, who they'd left behind because they were as equally unglamourous as the developers, although at least some of them had heated swimming pools.

So the games remained the same, except for having more expensive budgets. But still no one paid attention and eventually the men in suits were so broke they were bought by the French and made redundant. And so the creative void got wider and the general public still didn't give games the respect they deserved and carried on watching *EastEnders*, reading Will Self and looking at the pictures made from crap.

The moral of the story? You can't buy respect. If you want to be taken seriously you need to listen to the people with the creative talent or all you'll end up with is a tatty old suit, and a guidebook to Parisian strip clubs. PCZ

PC ZONE

THE FIRST AND BEST PC GAMES MAGAZINE

ISSUE 123 CHRISTMAS 2002 **£4.99**

MEDAL OF HONOR
ALLIED ASSAULT
SPEARHEAD

*YOU'VE WON THE BATTLE,
NOW YOU CAN WIN THE WAR*
The next chapter of the world's
best shooter is here

REVIEWED

STAR TREK: STARFLEET COMMAND III
PROJECT NOMADS
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2
WWE RAW

FIRST REVIEW

JAMES BOND
007
NIGHTFIRE

MASSIVE REVIEW

AGE OF
MYTHOLOGY
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FIRST SCREENSHOTS

CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER 4